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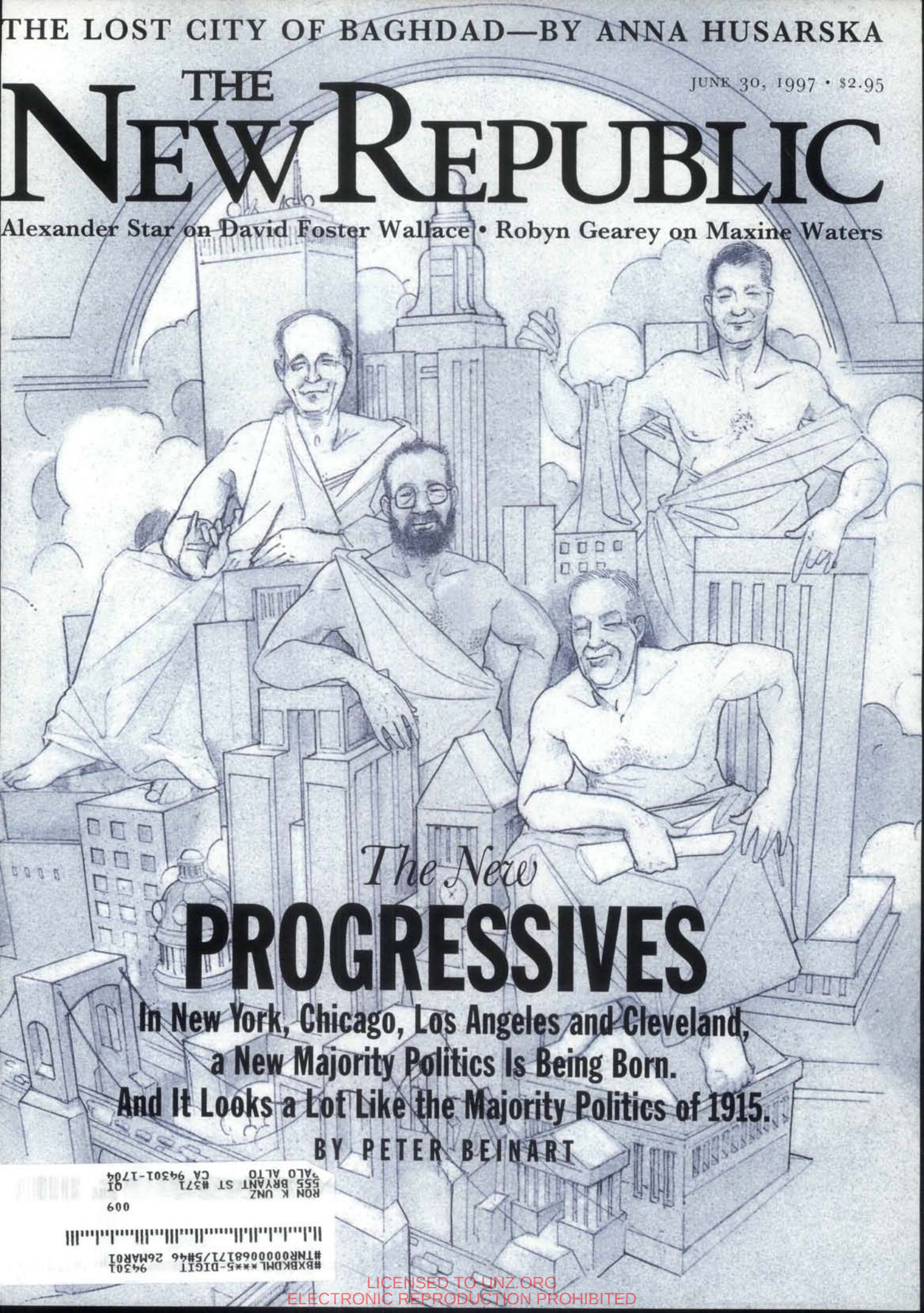
Alexander Star on David Foster Wallace • Robyn Gearey on Maxine Waters



The New

PROGRESSIVES

In New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Cleveland, a New Majority Politics Is Being Born. And It Looks a Lot Like the Majority Politics of 1915.

BY PETER BEINART

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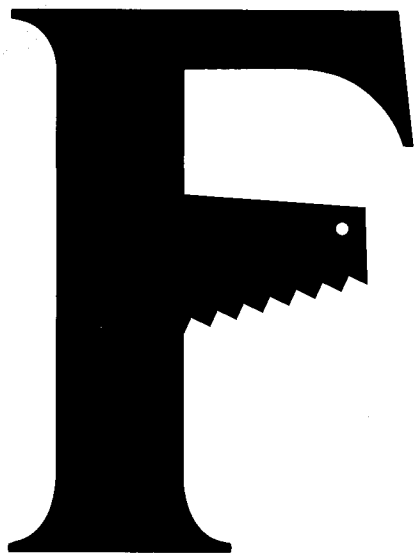

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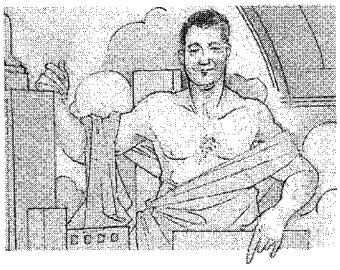

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CORRESPONDENCE

Grim reaper

To the editors:

Having read Michael Betzold's "The Selling of Dr. Death" (May 26), I think he, in an oddly unintended way, gives me far too much credit. While I contest his interpretation of what I have written, I think it is absurd to say I had the ability to change not only the "tone of the [*New York*] *Times*'s coverage from critical to favorable" but that of the world press.

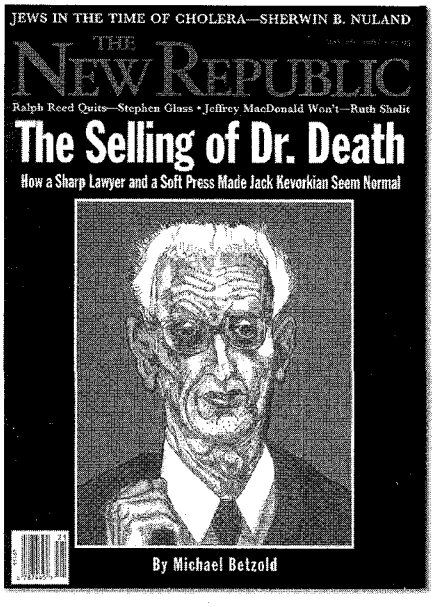
I strongly doubt that is true. Certainly there is room for considerable debate on the relationship between reporters and sources on any long-term, continuing story. Yes, I have cultivated Jack Kevorkian and Geoffrey Fieger and others in order to get the "inside story," as Betzold says. I have revealed aspects of that story that no one else has, or could otherwise have done. Yes, I do write a tongue-in-cheek, frequently sarcastic column, "Politics & Prejudices," in a Detroit-area alternative paper in which I express opinions on this, and many other issues, often in parody form. I have never disguised that, though a number of the partial and semi-quotes Betzold used were taken quite out of context, and other things he says are simply not true: I have never thrown a party for Kevorkian; I do, indeed, intend to write a book, my book, on this issue and these people, but have no desire to write, as Betzold claims, an "authorized biography."

Betzold also makes many errors; I note in passing that Kevorkian's Michigan medical license has not been revoked, merely suspended (a significant legal difference) and that after six years on the beat he ought to spell correctly the name of Kevorkian's longtime aide, Neal Nicol.

Moreover, what Betzold omits is that I have been quite critical of Kevorkian and his entourage. Fieger, a handful for any reporter to contend with, has twice threatened to sue me—once over my July 1994 *Vanity Fair* article, which begins with Kevorkian having a screaming temper tantrum and goes on to reveal, among other unflattering things, that Kevorkian once fired Fieger for inviting a TV camera crew to an assisted suicide. I have commented sarcastically on the legal fiction of pretending in court this was about "relieving pain and suffering," and not about ending life. Last fall, I wrote a story in Kevorkian's hometown *Oakland Press*, noting that he was violating his own professed guidelines.

All this is somewhat subjective, and there is, to be sure, a real question about whether I—or anyone—who has expressed opinions can do objective news coverage. The conventional answer, of course, is no, though everyone knows that most journalists assigned to a continuing story tend to form strong opinions that they often cheerfully express to their fellows and friends while maintaining "objectivity" in print.

I always have been open and honest about where I was coming from with all concerned. I have reflected a scrupulously fair account of what has transpired in legal proceedings in what I have written—mainly unsigned pieces—in *The New York Times*, in which I have profiled the prosecutors as well as the defense attorneys. At a recent panel discussion on courtroom coverage of the media at my university, both the judges who


JEWS IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA—SHERWIN B. NULAND
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Ralph Reed Quits—Stephen Glass • Jeffrey MacDonald Won't—Ruth Shalit
The Selling of Dr. Death
How a Sharp Lawyer and a Soft Press Made Jack Kevorkian Seem Normal
By Michael Betzold

presided over last year's trials singled out my *New York Times* coverage as having been, in their opinion, the most fair.

To say, as Betzold does, that Kevorkian "would be, I think, more properly seen as a mad scientist" is no more useful than the portrayal of him as some sort of a saint. What is needed is sincere and honest discussion of what we do—as well as what they do, and how to go about it.

JACK LESSENBERRY
Huntington Woods, Michigan

Michael Betzold replies:

When it comes to Jack Kevorkian, people believe what they want to believe, regardless of facts. Jack Lessenberry believes a journalist can openly advocate an issue, be a sort of gatekeeper and press secretary for his subjects, and still report on the matter fairly. The record shows otherwise. With the few exceptions he notes, his stories are heavily slanted Kevorkian's way, with critics and critical facts often omitted. And, belying his claim of openness, a *New York Times* spokeswoman said the paper didn't know about the op-ed columns he wrote in Detroit in which twice he called for acquittals before trials he was to cover for the *Times* had even started.

As for factual quibbles: Kevorkian's license was suspended because the medical board believed he was violating physician ethics; the Nicol misspelling was a typo introduced by an editor in a final edit; and Lessenberry told me he gave a party featuring Kevorkian and Fieger. As for any Lessenberry book, we'll have to wait and see. My characterization of Kevorkian was that "in caricature, he would be, I think, more properly seen as a mad scientist than a ghoul." Many would consider that a fair assessment of a man who advocates medical experiments as part of euthanasia for people who are disabled and depressed.

Fabrication

To the editors:

John B. Judis's "Trick of the Trade" (June 16) provides a maliciously false account of the bilateral agreement on textiles and apparel between China and the United States. Perhaps most important, Judis failed to recognize that the agreement reached this January extends the terms of a 1994 accord that has reduced the volume of Chinese textile and apparel imports in the United States over the past three years.

In negotiating this agreement, we actively involved the U.S. textile and apparel industry at every step of the process. In fact, the industry supports a key provision we sought providing a special "safeguard" mechanism for the textile industry in the U.S. market for some time after China might become a member of the World Trade Organization. To be clear, this provision represents the highest level of enforceable trade terms after the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing runs its course. The agreement governs textile trade terms among all WTO member countries through 2004.

There are no "secret" elements of this agreement. All provisions of this accord have been fully disclosed to the U.S. textile and apparel industry. The agreement is now initialed as a "Memorandum of Understanding" and will be publicly available when the U.S. and China exchange formal diplomatic notes, normal procedure in trade negotiations.

Regrettably, Judis overlooks various important achievements in the agreement in addition to the real story about the safeguard mechanism. We opened the door to China's market for our exports in this sector for the first time for U.S. producers and strengthened

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enforcement terms against illegal transshipments. Accounts of the agreement in the press confirm broad industry consultation and disclosure of the terms of the agreement. The February 6 issue of *The Journal of Commerce*, for instance, noted:

"... the pact gives the United States the right to use bilateral safeguard mechanisms to regulate Chinese exports. That would apply even if China becomes a member of the World Trade Organization and when worldwide quotas on textiles, negotiated as part of the global Agreement on Textiles and Clothing, expires in 2005."

Perhaps next time Judis will seek a more complete picture of the terms and conditions of U.S. trade agreements prior to publishing information that is patently misleading and false.

RITA D. HAYES
Chief Textiles Negotiator
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

We have rarely seen an article as inaccurate as "Trick of the Trade." Without checking the facts, John B. Judis maligns the United States Trade Representative Office's Chief Textiles Negotiator, Rita D. Hayes, and misrepresents her achievement in successfully negotiating a landmark textile trade agreement between China and the United States.

Judis claims access to "a pirated copy" of an "agreement that Hayes signed and that the administration refuses to make public." In fact, the administration makes every agreement public only after it has been reduced to a formal agreement in the language of both parties. The latest textile agreement with China is not yet available because the Chinese are painstakingly slow. When it is completed and signed, it will be a public document.

Judis also suggests a "secret" deal. This is ludicrous. Over the months this agreement was negotiated, Hayes conferred with the industry. And during each of the four negotiating sessions, beginning in October 1996 and ending in January of this year, she regularly briefed us, sometimes as often as twice a day. In addition, Hayes disclosed details of the agreement to members of the news media. Stories outlining the agreement appeared in the February 6 issue of *Women's Wear Daily* and in *Inside U.S. Trade*.

To set the record straight, the administration was not "pursuing two parallel sets of negotiations with Beijing." When the American Textile Manufacturers Institute and the American Apparel Manufacturers Association set objectives for the negotiations, we wanted quotas on Chinese textile and apparel imports to endure and be phased out over ten years after China's entry into the WTO, even though the 1994 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade ends all such quotas in 2004. If this objective was unattainable, we proposed a "must-have" alternative—a special right to limit Chinese imports if those imports caused "market disruption" beginning in 2005. When the Chinese rebuffed our first proposal, Hayes offered our alternative and prevailed. She did not "secretly rejec[t] the industry's position without even consulting with or later informing" us, as Judis says.

In briefing us on the agreement, Hayes pointed out that, from 2005 through 2009, the China agreement locks in a special "safeguard" allowing the United States to impose quotas when certain textile or apparel imports from China cause "market disruption." She has never implied that quotas on Chinese imports would last for ten years and continue unabated even if China joins the WTO; and we have never been under this impression.

We are deeply disappointed that a magazine of your reputation would print such an article.

JOHN C. ADAMS
President, American Textile Manufacturers Institute
C.E. WHALEN, JR.
Chairman, American Apparel Manufacturers Association
Washington, D.C.

John B. Judis replies:

There is nothing that a journalist finds so galling as being falsely accused of producing a "maliciously false account." The facts of the story remain unchanged. As Hayes does not deny, she signed an agreement with China that gave the Chinese a major concession: that whenever they joined the WTO, they would enjoy retroactively the benefits from the ten-year phaseout in textile quotas that began in 1994 rather than having to wait ten years, as the industry demanded, from the time they join the WTO. Hayes concealed her concession from the textile industry and from the reporters who cover it.

It is this latter charge of concealment that Hayes denies, but her denials are demonstrably untrue. Hayes says I "failed to recognize" that the agreement she signed extended an older accord. But it's clearly stated in the second paragraph of my article. Hayes says that she "actively involved" the textile industry "at every step in the process." In fact, she didn't involve them at all in the decision on the ten-year phaseout. Textile officials who were in Beijing with Hayes told me they were completely unaware of Hayes's enormous concession.

The agreement was not "fully dis-

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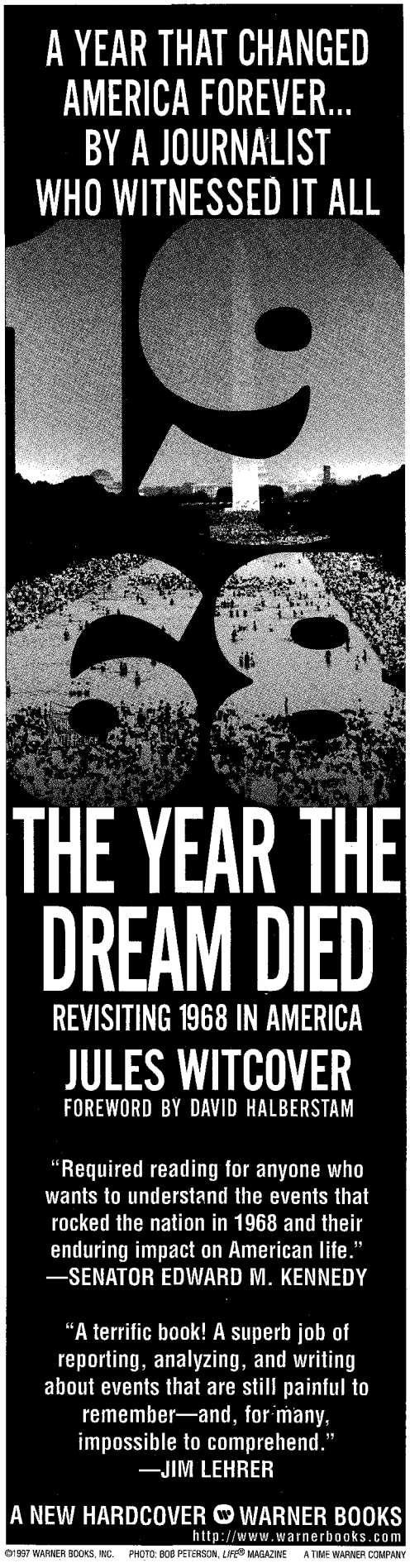
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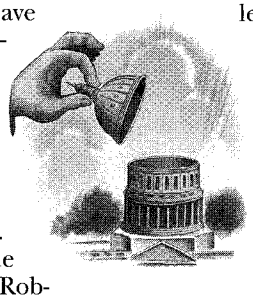
FROM WASHINGTON

The Reich stuff

"I claim no higher truth than my own perceptions. This is how I lived it."
—former Clinton Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich, in a Note to the Reader in *Locked in the Cabinet.*

"For God's sake, man, get a grip on yourself!" The Secretary of Labor's voice cut like the crack of a whip through the Cabinet Room. Robert B. Reich stood towering over the Treasury Secretary, who lay curled in the fetal position on the fine Aubusson carpet, whimpering and mewling like a kitten. "And take your thumb out of your mouth, Bentsen! You're in the presence of the President of the United States!" Robert B. Reich raked one coolly calculating ice-blue eye around the room. The President was ashen. The Vice President was oaken. The other Cabinet secretaries were on the edge of panic, the fear shining in the little pig-eyes that were the only sharp features in their pasty, plump faces.

Robert B. Reich wheeled on his heel. "You, and you!" he barked at two hulking Secret Service agents. "Get the Secretary of Treasury out of here. Take him by the underground tunnel to his office. Take the president's doctor with you. I don't care what you have to pump into this man—coffee, B complex, oxygen, extract of pineal gland—but I want him clean, sane and sober by 0100, ready to face Congress." The agents glanced at each other and traded a quick, satisfied grin. "Blue Steel to the rescue again," said one, referring to Robert B. Reich by his Secret Service code name. As they were bearing the broken, drunken Treasury Secretary from the room, the craven figure turned back to face Robert B. Reich. "Bob, I know I've never played straight with you, but I'm begging you now. Only you stand between us and the greatest global depression in history. Please, Bob. I'm not asking for the country. I'm asking for myself. It would kill me to be poor."



"Get him out of here *now*," Robert B. Reich snapped to the agents, his Lincolnesque features contorted in a grimace of disgust. He turned to the others and motioned for them to sit. Robert B. Reich folded his own lean 6'4" frame into his chair, and for a moment the silence in the room was nearly absolute, punctuated only by the nervous drumming of the President's fingers on the Cabinet tabletop: *pocketa-pocketa-pocketa.* Robert B. Reich faced the frankly frightened leader of the free world. "Sir, the situation is this," he said. "In one hour, the foreign gold markets will open, and we will see the greatest run on the American dollar in history—unless we do exactly what I say. Now, first." . . .

"Bob? Bob? Did you hear me? Hellooo. Earth to Bobby, anybody home?"

"Wha? Huh?" said Robert B. Reich. He looked at the President with blank wonder. The other Cabinet secretaries were snickering. "Christ, he's got the attention span of a 4-year-old," Bentsen whispered loudly to Christopher. Robert B. Reich blushed scarlet. "Bob, what I was asking was, do you know what the unemployment figures for next month are going to show?" the President asked.

"Uh, no, uh, I mean yes, I mean I'm sure I have it here somewhere." Robert B. Reich leaned hastily forward to fumble through the pile of papers in front of him and watched with paralyzed horror as a hand that seemed to be attached to somebody else's flailing arm knocked over his coffee cup, sending a brown stream onto Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala's lap. "Oh, God! Bob, you *idiot,*" wailed Shalala, leaping up, "That's the third time this month!" Robert B. Reich found himself, for the third time in a month, rushing from the Cabinet Room as fast as his legs could propel him, the sound of laughter ringing in his burning ears.

. . . "Oh, God! Bob, you *animal*! That's the third time this hour!" Robert B. Reich looked fondly at Clarissa Woods-Bourke, the beautiful and brilliant Oxford-educated sociobiologist who had been appointed Secretary of Health and Human Services to rebuild a department shattered by scandal. Clarissa stretched sinuously, so that her long, lithe body rippled against Robert B. Reich's own lanky yet muscular form. "You're ruining me," she murmured. Robert B. Reich allowed himself the rare luxury of a satisfied smile. Famous in Washington as his own harshest critic, he almost never let himself think any but the most self-critical thoughts. But Clarissa made him feel good about

continued on page 42

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JUNE 30, 1997

THE HEALING GAME

If the racial situation in America is anything, it is grave. Things are worse when they were supposed to be better. Bitterness and ugliness abound. The inner city continues to rot. There is racism and there is racialism, among whites and blacks. An old idealism has given way to a new impotence. Unlike many questions that are pressed upon the attention of the American people, this is a question with gravity. At least it has that going for it.

But here is the president of the United States proposing to empty the question of its gravity. "After months of White House debate over how to improve race relations and add heft to President Clinton's second term," *The New York Times* reported on June 5, "Mr. Clinton has decided to hold town meetings around the country, appoint a high-powered advisory panel and write a report next year summarizing his findings." And the president will write the report himself, whatever that means.

This is what passes, in the era of Clinton, for "heft." Also, it is just plain meretricious. It is premised, for a start, on the notion that the problem is that Americans are misunderstanding each other, when the problem is that they are understanding each other perfectly. What they are understanding is that they do not have the same views and the same objectives in the struggle for equality in America. Some Americans are integrationists and some Americans are separatists. Some Americans believe that the present has the power to correct or to annul the past, and some Americans believe that the past is the most important fact about the present. Some Americans believe in color-blindness and some Americans believe in color-partiality. Some Americans believe in merit and some Americans believe in preferment. Some Americans believe in equality of opportunity and some Americans believe in equality of outcome. Some Americans believe in governmental action and some Americans believe in individual and communal action.

Bill Clinton has dedicated his political life to the proposition that the truth is a little bit of what everybody believes. His agility is properly notorious. There is nothing in the world that he loves more than a contradiction. A contradiction doubles his pleasures and his numbers. He is not a repairer of the breach, he is a creature of the breach. He owes it everything. In fastening upon race, he has fastened upon the most spectacular breach in American history. It will test even his talent for elision.

When he is not merely agreeing with everyone serially, Clinton works the contradictions in two ways: with pedantry and with sentimentality. A wonk is a person who can rid a problem of governance of its moral and philosophical aspects, and our president is a fine wonk. He knows how to take a cause or a grievance or a symbol or an idea and show that, at the level of policy, things are just not that simple, and we must try and err and try again, and put a learning curve where a conviction used to be. The president likes details because they are too small to carry the weight of a worldview. (When you don't want to talk about the forest, talk about the trees.) "Mend it, don't end it" is a fine illustration of Clinton's gift for disguising opportunism as reasonableness. His policy on affirmative action is not really mending it and not really ending it, but it looks so handsomely post-everything.

Then there is the sentimentality. Instead of addressing the substance of conflict, Clinton prefers to address the experience of conflict. He wants to know how it feels to you. He wants you to know how it feels to him. For reality is largely what reality feels like. This is where the "town meetings" come in. They are therapeutic exercises masquerading as democratic exercises. Who does not already know what the president will hear, as he talks to Americans about race? He will hear sorrow, anger, regret, anger, hope, anger. This black man should not have been denied a ride in that taxi. That white man should not have been denied a place at this university. Clinton will be moved. He will move himself. He will feel bad, which will make him feel good. In the discussion of race in America, the president will not champion liberalism and he will not champion conservatism. He will champion emotionalism.

All this is an insult to the Americans, black and white, whose lives are more and more disfigured by this curse on our country. If the president cannot speak about race unpolitically, unambiguously, and unmoistly, if he insists on healing instead of leading, then he should not speak. •

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NOTEBOOK

HEMLOCK STALKS AT MIDNIGHT: Ozzy Osbourne may bite the heads off bats, but he's about to hear from a macabre musician with a real suicide solution. Yes, Dr. Jack Kevorkian himself has released a CD, *Kevorkian Suite: A Very Still Life.* If a title that mordant proves irresistible, be aware that $4 of your purchase will help finance the construction of Kevorkian's "patholysis clinic," which is intended as a "safe haven" for would-be self-asphyxiators everywhere. "[I'm] a huge fan of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw," Kevorkian writes inside the CD. " 'Celery Stalks at Midnight' can always be counted on to make me smile." Some of his own somnambulant melodies include: "Whispering, Came Violets," "In Strange Loops" and "Fuguetta Caffeine." *The New York Post* describes the effort as "12 dirge-like jazz instrumentals," with Dr. Death himself serenading on the flute and organ. If the amateurish dirges drive you to despair, don't be a burden on your family. You know who to call.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE: Last year, after a string of church burnings in the Southeast, the national media jumped on the story. Setting the tone was *The New York Times,* which ran numerous stories full of dark hints that a broad racist conspiracy lurked behind the burnings. To read the *Times,* it looked like 1963 all over again. For example, on June 19, 1996, the *Times* reported "fears that some 37 fires in black churches throughout the South in the last 18 months are somehow linked, either directly by a racially motivated conspiracy or indirectly through an atmosphere of racial hatred." Now, according to a report issued June 8 by the president's National Church Arson Task Force, it seems those fears were misplaced. Very few of the burnings were linked to organized hate groups, and there is no evidence of a national conspiracy. Some newspaper editors recognized the significance of this good news, and played it appropriately. *The Washington Post* ran the story on its front page, above the fold. What did *The New York Times* do? It ran a tiny Associated Press story, buried at the bottom of page A20, under the wholly deceptive headline, "PANEL SAYS CHURCHES ARE STILL TARGETS." At the nation's most powerful newspaper, the news that we are not in fact a nation of racists—that times may have changed for the better in the last three decades—just isn't fit to print.

FUND-RAISING PIETY WATCH: It was positively un-Clintonian: decisive, bold and morally unambiguous. Last winter, after months of scandals surrounding his fund-raising habits during the 1996 election, the president vowed in atypically uncompromising language that the Democratic Party would unilaterally stop accepting soft money donations from individuals in excess of $100,000. But on June 11, in positively Clintonian fashion, the president co-hosted a $250,000-per-plate, soft money fund-raiser for the Democratic Party. Asked whether Clinton still stood by the $100,000 limit, the president's spokesman, Michael McCurry, said: "[Clinton] thinks that the voluntary limits that they put in place were a good idea at the time." So what changed? "We're not going to unilaterally concede the 1998 election to the Republican Party," McCurry noted. Of course, he insisted Clinton was not breaking his original promise. You see, the president said his party wouldn't accept soft money donations of more than $100,000 from individuals. But he didn't say that donors couldn't give $100,000 *twice.* So the $250,000 donors will give $100,000 this year, and a second $100,000 next year, raising the last $50,000 from pals. "We're still adhering to the $100,000 cap," Democratic National Committee spokeswoman Melissa Bonney told *The New York Times.* "The operative words are giving *and* raising." There are some other operative words we can think of.

THE JUICE IS LOOSE (AGAIN): Faithful TNR readers might recall from last week an item on the spate of honorary degrees being handed out to intellectual heavy hitters like Boston Red Sox slugger Mo Vaughn. Well, apparently we ignored the ultimate example of the decline of higher education. In May, the University of California at Irvine invited a special guest lecturer for its advanced seminar on the O.J. Simpson trial—O.J. himself. "I can't think of a more appropriate guest speaker than Simpson," a student wrote in a letter to *The Los Angeles Times,* defending the school's choice. Simpson's topic: judicial bias. Next week look for Timothy McVeigh's lecture on cruel and unusual punishment.

CLONE RANGERS: As scientists sort out what the advent of cloning will mean for life on Earth, a flock of political agitators are bleating about a far more engrossing subject: What's in it for them? Randolfe Wicker, a New York gay activist who heads up something called the Clone Rights United Front, has accused the National Bioethics Advisory Commission of "push[ing] cloning into the back alleys." Wicker, who opposes the commission's recommendation of a limited ban on human cloning, says he is defending his reproductive rights: "I realize my clone would be my identical twin," he told *USA Today.* "And my identical twin has a right to be born." Pro-lifers, meanwhile, are using the cloning debate as a fig leaf for their quest to ban *all* human embryo research, whether cloned or not. In a press release titled "National Right to Life Response to Cloning Recommendations," the National Right to Life Committee president opines that "with time and nourishment, human embryos grow to be adult humans." The press release continues: "the National Right to Life Committee opposes the destruction of living human beings, including human clones." Coming next: the ACLU on why banning clones violates the right to express one's genetic identity. •

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A supply-sider's taxing logic.

LESS IS MOORE

By Jonathan Chait

Republicans were very certain about one thing in 1993. "Three hundred billion in new taxes," Newt Gingrich declared at the time, "is going to shrink the economy, put people out of work, lower tax revenues." Op-ed after fearful op-ed echoed this party line: higher tax rates would bring in lower revenues.

Of course, just the opposite happened—the economy grew fatter, millions more went to work and revenues soared—and supply-siders haven't had an explanation. But on June 5 *The Wall Street Journal* printed the first effort by a voodoo economist—in this case, Stephen Moore, director of fiscal policy studies at the Cato Institute and former adviser to Dick Armey—to reckon with the inconvenient lack of a recession following the 1993 tax hike. It's just one measly op-ed, but it's worth dwelling on because it shows so clearly how an economic theory that continues to hold sway over the political system is completely impervious to data. Also, on a more ignoble level, it's rare that history repudiates a theory so utterly, and it's just fun to watch an intellectual apologist squirm.

The daunting feat of historical revisionism Moore undertakes requires especially devious methods to torture the data. Moore, however, is up to the task. The first thing he does is change the question. Moore obviously can't argue that tax revenues dropped after 1993. Instead he notes that tax revenues rose, after inflation, just 21.6 percent in the 1990s, while they shot up 24.1 percent during the 1980s. "[T]otal federal revenues grew at a slightly faster pace," he notes. While Moore tries to pass this off as vindication, it's actually a telling concession. After all, in 1993 Moore flatly predicted that Clinton's plan would "torpedo" the economy. Now he is reduced to merely arguing that it produced slightly less miraculous results than Reagan managed.

But, even for this, Moore has to turn a few somersaults. Instead of comparing the rate of revenue growth under Reagan against the rate of growth under Clinton, he selects his years carefully. While the Reagan tax cuts began in 1981, Moore starts with 1982, a recession year. Since economic growth and tax revenues always shoot up quickly after a recession, this makes it look as if the natural results of the business cycle were actually the magic of Reagan's tax cuts. (Moore did not invent this trick; if you read nothing but the *Journal* editorial page, you would think that Reagan took office in 1982.) To further stack the deck, Moore starts the Clinton era in 1990. There's a certain fairness here, because Moore is trying to argue that tax increases lead to lower tax revenues, and there was a tax increase in 1990. The problem is, there was also a recession that year. So the "Reagan" years begin with the economy climbing out of a recession, and the "Clinton" years begin with the economy sinking into one.

Pretty sneaky, huh? Well, that's not the half of it. Remember, Moore is trying to prove that lower income taxes bring in higher revenues. But, instead of comparing income tax revenues, he compares *total* tax revenues. That's not just income taxes. It also includes revenue from the payroll tax, which Reagan hiked. In other words, Moore uses the extra revenues brought in by Reagan's payroll tax hikes to hide the revenue lost by Reagan's income tax cuts. Rattling around in Moore's brain, somewhere, is the germ of a realization that something about his calculation is a tad unfair. So later in the essay he makes amends, sort of. "Even if we examine the path of only individual income tax collections over the past 15 years," Moore writes magnanimously, as if bending over backwards to be fair rather than correcting his own fundamental error, "the story is not much different." Here is where Moore is going to show us how income tax revenues, like total tax revenues, rose faster during the 1980s. This is the really beautiful part of his essay. It's worth quoting in full:

> From 1982 to 1989 income tax receipts climbed from $298 billion to $446 billion—a 50 percent increase. From 1990 to 1997 the income taxes rose from $467 [billion] to an estimated $710 billion—a 52 percent increase.

If you didn't just slap yourself on the forehead, read that passage again. And possibly again. Because Moore surrounds his numbers with ringing declarations of victory, it took me until my third perusal to realize that the Clinton-Bush number is *higher* than the Reagan number. Moore has repudiated his own point. Maybe he has failed to grasp the basic mathematical concept here: the number 52 is greater than, not less than, the number 50.

Actually, it might be generous to call Moore ignorant, given the way he arrived at the 50 and 52 figures in the first place. Keep in mind that, when Moore compared total tax revenues, he rightly used the percentage increase after inflation. But when comparing just income tax revenues—which is the relevant statistic—he doesn't factor out inflation. Why not? Because inflation was higher under Reagan. Ignoring inflation makes the comparison look closer than it is in reality. If you take out the part of the increase that was due to inflation, income tax revenues from 1982 to 1989 rose just 16.5 percent, while from 1990 to 1997 they rose 24 percent—*half again faster.* Hmm. I wonder why Moore forgot to control for inflation this time?

The funny (and frustrating) thing about this is that Moore and his ilk have actually won the debate. In 1995, Clinton publicly conceded that he raised taxes too high. And, in the latest budget pact, he has agreed to institute a supply-side tax cut. Sometimes historical vindication is small consolation. •

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TROUBLED WATERS

By Robyn Gearey

When, in August of last year, the *San Jose Mercury News* ran a series of articles claiming that the CIA had at least implicitly condoned the sale of crack by contra-connected Nicaraguan drug traffickers and was thereby responsible for the explosion of crack use in South Central Los Angeles, one reader who didn't need much convincing was the congresswoman from South Central, Maxine Waters. "I think it is unconscionable," she told a rally, "that the intelligence community or the CIA could think so little of people of color that they would be willing to destroy generations to try to win the war in Nicaragua."

But the *Mercury News* story was, as newspaper people say, an exclusive that remained an exclusive. In the months following its publication, three of the best papers in the nation—*The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*—investigated and thoroughly repudiated its findings. This is the sort of thing that might give even the most demagogic member of Congress slight pause. Well, not the *most* demagogic. The possibility that the *Mercury News*'s terrible accusation was terribly wrong did not, apparently, make the slightest dent in Maxine Waters's willingness to believe the worst. In January, after the publication of the challenges to the *Mercury News* series, the four-term congresswoman took a side journey from a visit to her ambassador husband in the Bahamas to drop by a Nicaraguan prison. There she met with a convicted drug dealer named Enrique Miranda Jaime, whom Waters believes is a key figure in an active conspiracy between drug rings and CIA-backed contra leaders to pump crack cocaine into American inner cities.

Waters described what she learned in Nicaragua to the online magazine *Salon*, and she spoke in a tone of breathless, dark—and vague—menace. "I have been to Nicaragua to talk to someone who is in prison there, who is connected with the cartel and who was supplying drugs to the drug trafficking ring," she declared. "I got the House Banking Committee to start an investigation on money laundering as it relates to this. One of the people who played a prominent role in the money laundering is now the head of a government agency in Nicaragua, responsible for investing foreign aid money that comes in from all over the world to Nicaragua! A lot of stuff is going on." The interviewer asked Waters if the knockdowns of the *Mercury News* series had given her any qualms. She dismissed the criticisms as professional jealousy: "A little newspaper up in San Jose was not supposed to clip *The New York Times* on a story like this," she said.

On May 11, the *Mercury News* itself published a signed editorial, confessing that the paper "did not have proof that top CIA officials knew of the relationship" between drug dealers and contra leaders. Still no dent in Waters's position. "That latest story didn't change things at all," she said defiantly. (Last week, the *Mercury News* pulled the reporter who wrote the series, Gary Webb, off the story and has refused to publish any of his follow-up stories.)

Welcome to Watersworld. From calling the L.A. riots a "civil uprising" to accusing the Aberdeen rape victims of racism, from her staunch defense of Ebonics to her charges that "the white press" is trying to undermine the NAACP, Maxine Waters has made outrageousness her stock-in-trade. Hers is a brand of political theater that sometimes crosses the line from outlandish to out of order. In May 1994, the California Democrat was arrested in front of the White House while protesting President Clinton's Haiti policy. A few months later, she shouted at New York Representative Peter King to "shut up" during a committee hearing on Whitewater, sparking a two-day conflagration. When Newt Gingrich was sworn in as speaker of the House, Waters made a point of refusing to stand.

In the past, Waters's posturings have merited little attention. But last November, she emerged as the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), a coveted, prominent position that affords her a national platform for her rants. Indeed, Waters's outspokenness is precisely why CBC members chose her to steer the organization in 1996, two years after the GOP took over Congress and steamrolled traditional liberal interests. Freshman Congressman Danny Davis of Illinois speaks of Waters in excited spurts, citing her "energy" and "high level of activism." South Carolina Congressman James Clyburn told *The Hill*: "Maxine has what the Caucus needs at this point."

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But, six months into Waters's tenure, it is clear that what the Caucus really needs, much more than outrageousness, is for the Democrats to regain control of the legislature. If the Democrats were back in the majority, the CBC would be more powerful than it has ever been, with at least four of its members holding critical House chairmanships, including Judiciary, National Security and Ways and Means. And what has also become clear is that Waters, whether she means to or not, is working against the goal of Democratic renewal. While her conspiracy theories may drive up her approval ratings in South Central, they make her look like a nut in Peoria.

"If she doesn't shut up about all this crack and Aberdeen stuff," gripes a Democratic staffer, "everyone's going to think the whole party is like that." Republicans cheerfully concur. "Maxine Waters is the kind of person who is going to take the party as far to the left as possible," says GOP consultant Jim Innocenzi, "which, frankly, helps the Republicans." So why don't her fellow Democrats try to make Waters put an occasional sock in it? "Well, you know, these are sensitive issues," says the staffer. "I guess no one wants to be accused of racism."

MAXINE WATERS BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Since its founding in 1971, the CBC has grown from a group of fifteen to the current thirty-nine members. The CBC had its heyday in 1993, when newly elected President Clinton found himself pleading for the group's votes on several crucial bills, including the crime bill and the 1993 budget. Of the CBC's forty members, three held committee chairmanships and seventeen held subcommittee chairmanships. But that influence vanished almost instantly on January 4, 1995. With the Republican takeover, the prized chairmanships reverted to the GOP, and Gingrich slashed the Caucus's $250,000 annual budget to zero. The CBC was forced to give up its staff and office space. And, since the chairmanship of the Caucus is rotated every two years, Maryland Representative Kweisi Mfume, the CBC's popular leader, handed the reins to Donald Payne, the soft-spoken, confrontation-averse congressman from New Jersey.

For two years, the CBC lay pretty much dormant. A discouraged Charles Rangel told *The Boston Globe* in December 1995, "We meet periodically with the president and we meet with the minority Democratic leadership—but about what? We don't have the votes to win." David Bositis, a political analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies who, in July 1993, called the CBC "quite possibly the single most influential bloc in the Democratic caucus," could not think of a single success the Caucus had in 1995. "There's no way they can put a good face on it," he told the *Globe*.

Desperate and divided, the CBC prepared for another election in November of 1996 to choose a new chair. The contenders were Waters and Louisiana Congressman William Jefferson. The race was symbolic of the growing fracture in the Caucus, which is composed of urban, mostly northern, liberals and more moderate Southerners. Waters—whose district spans South Central Los Angeles and Watts—is representative of the former; Jefferson, who hails from New Orleans and often votes with the GOP on such issues as free trade and family values, the latter. "Everyone expected Jefferson would win," says one former Hill staffer. "But [Waters] got civil rights activists like Jesse Jackson and Mfume to put on a lot of pressure. We saw right away that she was going to be aggressive." And so moderation lost to melodrama.

Waters's leadership so far has consisted mostly of speechifying rather than legislating or negotiating. Of the most important item of the 105th Congress, the budget, Bositis says: "I can't say that the Congressional Black Caucus or Representative Waters has had any impact." Waters's bill to establish a select committee to look into the supposed CIA-crack alliance, introduced in January, has no cosponsors and still lingers in some remote subcommittee. The CBC's agenda—a series of bills on drugs and education as well as modifications to last year's welfare bill—is also stagnating. "It's not a realistic approach for getting communities involved and

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for getting people off welfare," says Majority Whip Tom DeLay's spokesman.

To what has the CBC been devoting its time? Mostly bananas. The CBC has gotten itself embroiled in a dispute with the Chiquita banana company over European quotas. According to the CBC, lifting the quotas would devastate small Caribbean banana growers. "These little countries will be destroyed by the drug lords," Waters told *The Washington Post.* Not a meaningless cause, but not one that resonates with American voters—the United States doesn't export a single banana.

Granted, Waters is in an unenviable role. No liberal Democrat finds it easy to work with a conservative Congress. And making her task more difficult is the fact that the Caucus she leads has become much more diverse and divisive in the past several years. But, rather than negotiate the ideological splits, Waters tries to mask them: "There is no divide in the Caucus," she says. That's not true, according to Bositis: "The Congressional Black Caucus does not have a life of its own ... the members of the CBC don't speak with one voice; they're all over the place." Indeed, members of the Caucus often split on important votes, most notably the Defense of Marriage Act and the crime bill, on which Waters vociferously refused to support the president. As for working to find any common ground with the Republican leadership, well, that's rare, too. "This is one of the only times this year, frankly, that I've seen the Congressional Black Caucus and the Republicans work together on anything," says Ohio Republican Rob Portman about Waters's support of his Drug-Free Communities Act.

"You can make statements and give speeches," says Bositis, "but the most important and effective people [in the House] don't want to be in that role. The most effective people are those that work to pass legislation.... Any influence the Caucus has right now is as individual legislators, not as an organization." Bositis's view that Waters's grandstanding is counterproductive is apparently shared by some of the more centrist Caucus members. When Waters played the race card on Aberdeen, the CBC was reluctant to back her. "They thought she overstepped, that it was too risky to make it a race matter," says a former Democratic Hill staffer. "She called a conference, but very few members attended."

Outside black interest groups are also growing restless. "We can't have our own agendas," says the soft-spoken activist Alveda King, daughter of civil rights leader A.D. King and niece of Martin Luther King Jr., of Waters. "We can't have just 'my ideas'; we have to put self aside and work together." For the Caucus as an organization to matter again, not only to African Americans, but to Democrats, that is precisely what Waters will have to do. If the Democrats win back the House, the Congressional Black Caucus will have more power than it ever imagined. But to get there, the CBC may need a leader who can work within the system instead of standing outside, railing against it. •

BAGHDAD DISPATCH

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

By Anna Husarska

A popular joke these days in Baghdad goes like this: an art dealer pays a woman 5,000 Iraqi dinars for a painting of Christ on the crucifix. Later, the woman returns and offers the dealer a portrait of Saddam Hussein. This time the dealer bids just 500. "Is that all?" the woman protests. "You gave me 5,000 for Christ crucified, and for Saddam Hussein you offer me only 500?" Replies the dealer, "Listen, lady, everything has its price. Bring me Saddam Hussein crucified, and I will give you 5 million."

Okay, so it's not a very good joke. But it gets a laugh in Baghdad, perhaps because telling it, or listening to it, has a special thrill in a country where the government shoots people who tell the wrong sort of jokes. There are a lot of such jokes going around town. The atmosphere here reminds me of the climate of communist Poland, where I lived for twenty-five years. There is the same smart, subversive, nervous humor, the same duality of dare and dare-not in every conversation. Many Iraqis are willing to criticize Saddam—and even wish explicitly for his downfall. They do not say such things publicly, of course, but they will be candid in private conversation—as long as they think they're out of range of the listening devices that are widely assumed to be nearly everywhere in the center city.

Of course, the disillusionment is not easy to see. The regime does its best to promote the image of resiliency; the portraits of the dictator are as famously ubiquitous as ever—on posters, stamps and all but the smallest banknotes. But the bitter anger is there, very close to the

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surface. Even government officials will mock state propaganda. "There are 42 million of us in Iraq," an employee of the Ministry of Trade joked to a friend of mine. "Twenty-one million citizens and 21 million portraits of him."

I heard quite a few such quips during the *Milad al Kaed*, the celebration of Saddam's birthday in late April. If every day in Iraq is an orgasm of state-induced idolatry of Saddam, the *Milad* was an extended orgy: days of state-sponsored celebrations throughout the country. On the natal day itself, Iraqi television dedicated all programming exclusively to Saddam. It consisted mostly of girls dancing in traditional costumes, endlessly serenading Saddam, "Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you...." There was even a virtual celebration: a birthday web site featuring fuzzy, black-and-white photos of Saddam as a baby.

There were birthday festivals in every city, and I visited one of them, a street fair in a posh part of Baghdad, on the 14th Ramadan street. Neighborhood committees, women's associations and professional groups set up tents, and musicians played songs dedicated to Saddam, horrible little tunes with lyrics like "you are the crown on our heads, you are everyone's love, we want only you." A few ensembles danced on podiums, while others watched. But, as I learned from the architect with whom I came, this had little to do with celebrating Saddam. The street party, he said, was just a good excuse for people to walk in the streets, to hear the blasting music and perhaps even to dance. Over the course of the whole evening, I saw only one person carrying a Saddam portrait with any evident sign of sincerity.

All that day, the television broadcast scenes of happy celebrants cutting birthday cakes in Saddam's honor. I must have watched a dozen on the tube, and I saw one in person, at that street fair. The cakes all looked grossly unappetizing: they were pink, fluorescent green and emerald, and had complicated three- and four-story constructions. (Only the bottom layer looked like actual cake—I think the rest was papier-mâché.) Later I managed to offend a group of four Iraqi women, who were asking about my day, when I mentioned my disgust at the cakes. They angrily told me I didn't appreciate the event's significance, and I thought for a moment they were piqued at my disrespect for Saddam. Hardly. It turned out that these birthday gâteaux were the first cakes most people in Baghdad had seen in years.

It is, anyway, not material deprivation but the endless grind of harassment itself that seems to be sparking the most frustration. A travel agent I met complained about petty inconveniences that made his job impossible: his agency cannot send a fax (for "security reasons") and so he must send every outgoing message by telex, which uses dedicated lines, separate from telephone traffic, and is therefore easier to bug. An official from the Ministry of the Interior must accompany every foreign tourist group. Any internal travel requires government permission, and visitors cannot take pictures anywhere without explicit authorization to do so. A photographer told me that the government went so far as to control the angle he used for shooting a monument.

I learned to be careful, too. I did not trust any hotel taxi drivers who might dabble as government informants, nor did I use the hotel's phone, which emitted a telltale "click" every time the line connected. A former hotel security chief told me that once a foreign tourist called the hotel staff to complain that there was a bug in her phone. The security chief answered the complaint himself, armed with a can of disinfectant. When the guest said that she had meant a listening device, the security chief told her, deadpan, that he was only authorized to remove live bugs.

Travel to and from Iraq has become nearly impossible for foreigners and citizens alike. Some 90 percent of the travel agencies at the Saddoun Street have closed down. The agencies that are still open cannot even sell tickets for flights advertised in the dust-covered 1990 schedules; their offices are decorated with posters of such nonexistent airlines as East Germany's "Interflug." All they can offer is a bus from Baghdad to Amman—a sixteen-hour journey. Of course, private travel is too expensive for most people here; the exit visa that an Iraqi needs to leave his country costs the equivalent of $400.

Iraq is also isolated diplomatically and intellectually. In Baghdad, a trained engineer who works as a taxi driver pointed to a row of flagpoles near a conference hall and said: "Look, so many poles, and no friendly countries whose flag we could fly." He talked about how this isolation had, in a sense, weakened his mind. He no longer received any professional literature from outside Iraq, and, of course, he no longer traveled to international conferences, so he lived as removed from the world of his profession as if he had never been an engineer at all. Anyway, there was practically no work left for engineers in Iraq; and, even if the engineer could find work, it would pay just three to five dollars a month. I heard of a pilot for Iraqi Airlines who works as a driver, too. The pilot was lucky: he is a driver for the United Nations staff in Baghdad, so he makes an exorbitant salary of $100 per month. Recently, the U.N. office here had a few openings for drivers, blue-collar workers and secretaries. Two thousand people applied, many of them with doctorates from American, French or British universities; a riot broke out at the gate of Hotel Canal, where the U.N. offices are located. It seems the U.N. doesn't like to hire locals. Expatriates from other Arab-speaking countries can perform most jobs requiring language skills, and they are preferred because the work involves a lot of sen-

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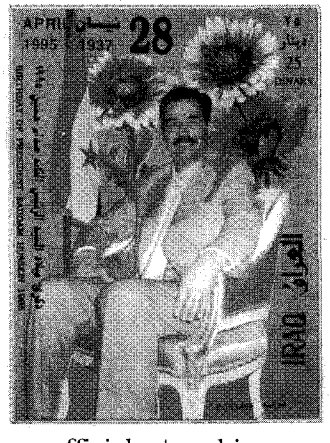
sitive issues: verifying the compliance with disarmament and monitoring the implementation of U.N. Resolution 986, an oil-for-food deal that authorizes Iraq to export crude oil in exchange for imports of food and medicine.

For the majority of Iraqis who are not among the privileged few (in Iraq, a doctorate holder is "privileged" if he can drive a cab), the only guarantee of sustenance is the rationing system that has operated for many years. But, as an art history teacher told me, the rations are insufficient and last only until the middle of the month: "too little to live on, too much to die on." The rationing covers sugar, wheat, oil, rice, tea, soap and detergent. For small children, there is also powdered milk. The full ration package costs only 105 dinars a person—roughly seven cents, but residents complain that flour and rice are not enough. (Saddam has apparently even mandated weight loss: I was told that a new law specifies the appropriate weight for male state employees and cuts rations for chubby clerks.)

Anything extra, above the ration, invites prohibitive prices. A pound of meat is 1,000 dinars (one-fifth of a government employee's salary), eggs are 50 to 100 dinars apiece, vegetables from 250 to 600 dinars per pound. The official stores sell these wares, too, but sometimes buyers create their own secondary markets. At the "28 April People's Supermarket" (another paean to the leader's birthday), I watched a crowd of customers peddling their surplus wares right outside the front door.



The official government representative who accompanied me on the ritual tour of a children's hospital that it seems every foreign reporter is obliged to take blamed, as always, the "American embargo" for the appalling conditions and the suffering of the children. That had a vaguely familiar ring: "the American embargo" was the way officials would explain bare grocery shelves in Poland. (My favorite government propaganda poster back then declared "Reagan is the assassin of Polish poultry." It had a rather demonic drawing of Reagan on horseback, wearing a Teutonic white cape, menacingly toting a spade in his hand.) But the people I met did not believe that the American embargo really had much to do with the plight of the children. Everyone I spoke to knew that Saddam had an expensive palace-building habit; everyone also knew that children were dying for lack of medicine that was available to the government, if Saddam cared to spend his money on this and not on more palaces.

Saddam rarely appears in public anymore. Many Iraqis believe that each day in every one of the leader's forty or so palaces the staff cooks a meal for him on the odd chance that he may appear. Nobody, not even his personal guards, knows his schedule. There are many Saddam look-alikes—one is said to have undergone plastic surgery to increase the similarity—but even they are jobless these days. Saddam may be more cautious because last December his son Uday was shot in Mansour, the neighborhood of Baghdad's upper classes. Some suggest Saddam ordered the shooting, because Uday was getting out of hand. Not politically, of course; personally. Uday's nocturnal habit of prowling the town with his armed bodyguards, boozing and indulging themselves in regular bouts of battery and rape, had, people said, at last moved his father to exert a little parental discipline. I don't know whether the story is true, but there is some evidence that Saddam was annoyed with Uday; Saddam had given Uday the minor position of chairman of the Olympic Committee, while Uday's younger brother, Qusai, had the more prominent job of overseeing internal security.

There have been other signs of trouble in Saddam's family life. In August 1995, two of Saddam's sons-in-law, brothers Hussein Kamel al-Majid, a lieutenant general, and Saddam Kamel al-Majid, a colonel, defected with their wives Rana and Raghad to Jordan, but were later lured back to Baghdad. After speedy divorces, the men were killed in February 1996, together with some of their sons. Uday is widely believed to have masterminded the killing. Last January a little item in the *Shouhada al Ghadab* (*Official Gazette*) apparently declared the deceased "martyrs of the people's anger"; thus did they stop being defectors.

Then there's Saddam's wife, Sajida Khairallah Talfah. Rumor has it she did not like seeing her in-laws and grandchildren killed; she is said to have been placed under house arrest. But as the BBC's John Simpson rightly remarks, she never went out much anyway, so it is difficult to say whether the story is true.

Saddam's woes don't seem necessarily to mean that he is imperiled. The spy state he has built is probably nowhere near as omnipotent as Iraqis fear, but it does achieve one important goal: it isolates the dissidents. I spoke with a dozen or so intellectuals, and all were profoundly disenchanted with Hussein and with his rule. Yet almost every single one believed that his or her view was in the minority—that all the others, including fellow members of the elite, either supported the regime or would not dare speak their minds. In other ways, too, the intelligentsia of Iraq live in isolation: they are cut off from the outside world because Iraq is a pariah state, rejected by the regime that would like all citizens to be puppets and ostracized by the common folk who envy the elites and believe in the state's denigrating campaign against independent minds. Theirs is the solitude of Boris Pasternak, Andrey Sakharov, Anna Akhmatova. And it is for this reason that Saddam survives. If Baghdad is starting to feel like Warsaw toward the end of communism's long decay, it still does not seem anywhere close to reaching the point the Polish people eventually reached—the point where the spirit of rebellion that begins with the dissent of isolated intellectuals coheres into something large and powerful enough to move the masses who can overthrow a despotic regime. In Iraq, every man is an island. •

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THE PRIDE OF THE CITIES

By Peter Beinart

Michael White, the mayor of Cleveland, is a Democrat, an African American and the son of a union activist. And he is at war with his party. First, he backed an end to forced busing. Then, he supported Republican Governor George Voinovich's radical school choice law, which offers students vouchers at parochial as well as private schools. Then, he made city workers compete against private firms for garbage collection, road maintenance and other contracts, prompting union officials to walk out of a speech he gave at the Democratic National Convention. Now, he's allied with the governor again, backing a bill by two Republican state legislators to grant him control over Cleveland's destitute school system and the authority to get "rid of any people who aren't directly tied to the direct education of children." Arrayed against him: the teachers' union, the NAACP and just about every elected Democrat in the city of Cleveland.

For a big-city mayor to be so at odds with his party would seem peculiar. Except that it's happening everywhere. Mike White got the idea to take over the schools from Richard Daley, the Democratic mayor of Chicago, who battled the municipal unions and his own party's nominee for governor, and two years ago won the right to introduce radical reforms into the management of Chicago's public schools. And White learned about the introduction of competition into city services in part from a study trip he and his staff took to Indianapolis, where Republican Mayor Steven Goldsmith has reduced city bureaucracy so radically that he's angered both patronage-minded GOP officials and the traditionally pro-Republican police unions. Goldsmith is also viewed as a "kindred spirit" by Mayor John Norquist of Milwaukee, a Democrat who, for the sin of supporting Republican Governor Tommy Thompson's welfare and school choice reforms, has made himself persona non grata with his city's public employee unions, the NAACP and the Democratic speaker of the state House of Representatives.

It goes on. Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan, whose support for affirmative action, gay rights and Senator Dianne Feinstein has led GOP Californians to dub him a RINO (Republican in Name Only), journeyed to Indianapolis during his first week in office and cited Goldsmith in his inaugural address. And Rudolph Giuliani, the Mario Cuomo-endorsing, illegal immigrant-defending, New York Republican who recently admitted that ideologically he is a "moderate Democrat," has met with Goldsmith on four separate occasions. Giuliani and Riordan also received pre-inauguration seminars from Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell, a Democrat, who, like Mike White, forced city employees to compete for contracts with outside firms, outraging municipal unions and most of his party.

Something interesting is happening here. Over the past five years or so, a half dozen Democratic and Republican mayors have come together in what an aide to one calls "an informal network." They speak to each other regularly, they cite each other without prompting, they copy each other's initiatives. In almost every case, they represent a radical break with their predecessors in office, and that break is largely about managing city government efficiently in the public interest rather than using it as a mechanism for arbitrating competing group interests. The new mayors are hugely popular: Mike White, Richard Daley, Steven Goldsmith, John Norquist, Richard Riordan and Ed Rendell have all been re-elected by wide margins, and Rudy Giuliani will almost certainly follow suit this fall. But they are outsiders in their own parties, viewed with suspicion and even contempt by the parties' most powerful constituencies. To explain their success and their iconoclasm, the press often dubs them pragmatists. But that misses the point. They have an ideology: that cities can dramatically alleviate seemingly endemic urban afflictions without a massive redistribution of wealth, that the way to achieve this is by using competition to make city services radically more efficient, and that cities must tolerate diverse identities without celebrating them to the detriment of a shared sense of public interest. These ideas have a coherence and a history. They just don't have a party, yet.

The history is progressivism. At the turn of the last century, America's cities were a scandal. The squalor, pathology and cultural transformation to which mass immigration had given rise shocked and terrified the native-born middle class. And, as outraged as they were by the immigrants them-

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selves, respectable people were even more hostile to the municipal regimes the immigrants spawned. As Andrew White, the president of Cornell, wrote in the journal *Forum* in 1890, "the city governments of the United States are the worst in Christendom."

The political machines that men like White despised had been created to bridge the material and cultural distance separating the immigrants from native society. In cities that offered newcomers few formal services, and in which the private sector often remained closed, the immigrant-driven city machines supplied housing, fuel, charity and—most importantly—jobs. Under machine leadership, America's cities built roads, sewers, streetlights and railcars at a furious pace, usually with little attention to the projects' cost-effectiveness, creating as many jobs as possible and distributing them to appease different constituencies. As Kenneth Fox notes in *Better City Government*, his history of that era, America's big cities in 1880 spent more than twice as much per capita as did the federal government. And the machines appealed to the immigrants symbolically as well as materially, installing ward leaders and aldermen who looked and talked like them, and defending their traditions against a disapproving native middle class that wanted to close down the immigrants' saloons and their dance halls—and bust their corrupt, powerful machines.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

This disapproval found expression in the reform movement that set itself against machines such as Tammany in New York. The reformers' ideology was summed up by then-U.S. Civil Service Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt, in a speech to the First Annual Conference for Good City Government, held in Philadelphia in 1894: "There are two gospels I always want to preach to reformers.... The first is the gospel of morality; the next is the gospel of efficiency." At the time Roosevelt spoke, his gospels were anathema to the immigrants who made up the electoral majorities in most cities. The gospel of efficiency meant introducing business and scientific principles into city administration to expunge the corruption and waste of machine politics. But what looked like corruption and waste to middle-class reformers looked to many impoverished immigrants like jobs. The gospel of morality attacked the machines for catering to various "special interests" rather than requiring a standard of upright conduct based on one "public interest." But immigrants suspected, correctly, that "the public interest" hid a good deal of nativism and racism. Many of the reformers sought to resurrect a version of city life that had existed before the massive immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. They advocated closing the borders, called for social legislation—such as prohibition laws—aimed at punishing the immigrants, and even suggested stripping the newcomers of their right to vote. Here, again, is President White of Cornell: "The work of a city being the creation and control of the city property, it should logically be managed as a piece of property by those who have created it, who have a title to it, or a real substantial part in it ... [and not by] a crowd of illiterate peasants, freshly raked in from the Irish bogs, or Bohemian mines, or Italian robber nests." The freshly raked voters of New York, Chicago and Boston stuck with the machines.

But, with the new century, reformers found ways to peel off enough immigrant voters to win. Some immigrant groups—especially Jews and Italians who felt partially shut out of Irish-dominated machines—began to recognize that although the machines provided services, they did not provide them particularly well. Meanwhile, the more enlightened reformers were learning to break with their movement's backward-looking elements, and they abandoned those initiatives designed to punish immigrants for their cultural differences. As political scientist Kenneth Finegold details in his book, *Experts and Politicians*, John Purroy Mitchel won the mayoralty of New York in 1913 by dominating among native-borns and dislodging chunks of the German, Italian and Jew-

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ish vote from the machines. He made these inroads partly by distancing himself from nativist crackdowns on Sunday drinking in immigrant neighborhoods.

The new reformist mayors made efficiency their obsession. Mitchel appointed as city chamberlain (chief policy adviser) Henry Bruère, head of the recently formed New York Bureau of Municipal Research. At the bureau, Bruère developed a 1,300-question survey designed to formalize and evaluate the performance of city employees and the delivery of city services. Aided by a young assistant, Robert Moses, Bruère tried to employ efficiency experts to grade the work of city employees on a numerical scale.

The same story played out in cities across the country. In 1909, a Municipal Efficiency Commission was formed in Chicago; Los Angeles set up an Efficiency Commission in 1913; in 1916, a Bureau of Governmental Research was born in Detroit. Run by middle-class reformers enamored of the scientific management principles of Frederick Winslow Taylor, and funded by businessmen who saw greater government efficiency as a way to improve urban conditions and thus prevent class upheaval, the efficiency commissions played key roles, either formal or informal, in setting policy for a new breed of mayors. And, in city after city, those mayors instituted the same reforms. Ernest Griffith shows in *A History of American City Government* how reformist mayors in Los Angeles, Detroit, Bridgeport, Schenectady and New York established centralizing purchasing boards to reduce mismanagement and corruption, with Schenectady reporting a 30 percent reduction in costs as a result. San Francisco, aided by the city's newly created Bureau of Governmental Research, instituted, for the first time, a detailed budget in accordance with business accounting principles; Philadelphia tried to end one company's monopoly on garbage pickup by asking different firms to compete for the contract. Between 1910 and 1912, Milwaukee's in-house Bureau of Efficiency and Economy rationalized municipal accounting, inventoried all city property and cut the cost of street paving from $2.40 to $1.35 per square yard.

Mike White has cut the cost of street paving in Cleveland from $6.53 per square yard to $4.69. He's done it by forcing his city's road repair unit to compete with private companies. Kenmore Construction Company bid $4.80 for the contract, but the city repair department beat them. It did so by changing work rules that had forced city employees to convene at a central garage every morning instead of going straight to their work site, by trimming repair teams from four workers to three and by a host of other reforms. The city is saving more than $1 million a year.

In 1896, industrialist John H. Patterson summed up the progressive era management reforms by explaining that "a city is a great business enterprise whose stockholders are the people." In 1997, Mayor Steve Goldsmith explains his reforms in Indianapolis this way: "We've explicitly applied a series of principles you're more likely to find in business school than in public affairs schools." Upon coming into office, Goldsmith, who sometimes calls himself Indianapolis's CEO, hired a national accounting firm to survey all the city's functions and find out how much it spent to do each of its thousands of different tasks. "What government does," Goldsmith says, "is that it tells you how much it spends and takes in overall. It doesn't tell you how much it costs to do any specific activity, for instance, to fill a pothole." Armed with this information, he solicited bids from private firms to see which tasks they could perform more cost-effectively. Private companies got the contracts for maintaining the city golf course. But city agencies reformed work rules and won the bidding for garbage collection and for maintenance of Indianapolis's fleet of cars and trucks. The city agencies signed contracts that tied pay to quantitative measurements of service delivery. The fleet repair team agreed to forgo the automatic raises they had enjoyed in their previous contract in return for the right to keep 20 percent of however much they saved the city by coming in below their bid. Goldsmith recounts with delight a story about a couple of mechanics who retired. A group of workers approached the supervisor and said that, if duties were restructured, the garage could do the same work without replacing them—thus reducing the city's costs while increasing the employees' salaries.

At the turn of the century, city governments often took aim at monopolistic private corporations and utilities. Now, the focus is more often on monopolistic government agencies. Today's reformers insist that the point is not whether services are provided by the private sector or the public sector, but that principles of efficiency govern the competition between the two. And, once again, the efficiency craze is repeating itself in city after city. In Philadelphia, Ed Rendell requires each municipal agency to set detailed monthly goals for how much it will spend, how much it will take in and how well it will deliver services. Every quarter, these reports are reviewed by a compliance committee, led by the mayor's chief of staff, which discusses with the agency heads how successful they've been in meeting the agreed upon measurements. Such detailed reviews led the city to contract out maintenance of city parks to a private firm, which cuts the grass in summer every two weeks (up from every seven) at no additional cost. The reviews also alerted city officials to information that previous yearly budgets missed—like the fact that the city was devoting the same number of employees and equipment to sewage treatment all year long, even though sewage tonnage is highest in the spring.

In Los Angeles, Richard Riordan, who went to visit Rendell before taking office and then tried to lure away his chief of staff, calls himself "an ideologue on efficiency." Riordan requires the head of every city department to establish quantifiable goals for the year,

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and "strategic priorities" for the next three to five, and ties employee pay to achievement. A former businessman, the mayor also distributes a concise budget patterned after company reports every year.

In Chicago, Richard Daley wrested control of the city's schools from a disastrous school committee two years ago and appointed a five-member board led by a president, a chief executive officer and a chief financial officer; Daley gave the new board enormous power to, in the board president's words, "operate more efficiently like the corporate world." The board, which has in two years eliminated a $1.3 billion projected deficit, found in its detailed accounting review that almost every Chicago school employed a full-time fireman to keep its coal fire boilers safe—although no school has used a coal fire boiler since the 1950s. The city is using some of the saved money to fund rigorous summer school sessions, which underperforming eighth graders must attend in order to move on to high school.

Behind these stories of administrative triumph lies a second great shift in America's urban politics, one that is proving highly unsettling to both political parties. In important ways, American cities today resemble American cities at the turn of the century. They are almost universally considered blights, places that many middle-class Americans regard as dangerous and foreign. And today, as then, there is a deep hostility toward the politicians who run cities. Think of the way middle-class Washingtonians view Marion Barry, or the way residents of the Detroit suburbs viewed Coleman Young.

Much of this hostility, it goes without saying, is racial and cultural. As at the turn of the century, there are now large elements of the white middle class that find the demographic changes in urban America threatening. Through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, they watched with contempt as black politics and black culture grew increasingly powerful within American urban life, and in the 1990s they have mustered almost as much animosity toward immigrants—Latinos, particularly. A powerful wing of the Republican Party now actively idealizes life in America before blacks and non-white immigrants enjoyed any public presence. This unhappiness over three decades of cultural change extends to a hostility toward the increased visibility of gays and lesbians and the political agitation of women, and a despair at the decline of organized religion. And all these transformations have been felt most powerfully in big cities.

But it is also true that middle-class antipathy stems today, as it did at the turn of the century, from the fact that America's city governments have, in the past few decades, been poorly run. And this reality has nothing to do with race. In fact, the black mayors who assumed power in the 1970s and 1980s picked up the bad governing habits of the white mayors they replaced. In the 1950s and 1960s, white ethnic mayors expanded the size and scope of city government—without much attention to whether city agencies were performing cost-effectively—because federal and state governments gave them the money to do so and because they didn't yet realize that increasing taxes and regulation would force businesses and homeowners out of the cities, devastating their tax bases. As in the late nineteenth century, there were political reasons to do so—a larger city government meant more jobs, and distributing jobs to different ethnic constituencies was the basis of a successful political coalition. Between 1962 and 1972 alone, spending in America's twenty-eight biggest cities rose 198 percent. When black and white liberal mayors took over in the 1970s and 1980s, the rhetoric changed but city government kept expanding. Federal and state aid rose even higher—increasing 370 percent between 1965 and 1974—and the New Left community activists who gained power in some of the new administrations were even more convinced that economic development would come through government spending, and even more willing to tax the private sector to pursue those ends. Furthermore, by the 1970s, municipal employee unions—firemen, police, custodians and especially teachers—had grown into powerful political forces in most big cities, and with great success they not only kept city government expanding but blocked efforts at introducing accountability into the delivery of services.

The civil rights generation mayors opened up city government to blacks and other minorities who historically had not benefited from city patronage. But this victory for racial justice made management reform even more difficult. The liberal, largely black mayors could not deny their needy supporters the same fruits of office that white ethnics had enjoyed for years. Blacks enjoyed even less presence in the private sector than white ethnics, so for blacks public-sector jobs became an important—perhaps the most important—path to the middle class. Speaking of Richard J. Daley's radical attack on Chicago's bloated school bureaucracy over the past two years, Donald Haider, professor of public management at Northwestern University and a former city budget director who ran against Harold Washington in 1987, says, "it would have been very difficult for Mayor Washington to do what Daley has done. [The view was] 'it's our turn to get those jobs.'... The Chicago Board of Education had become one of the largest employers in Chicago. Its leadership had turned minority, and more than half of its employees were not teachers. Privatization was seen as a civil rights issue back then."

To understand why the civil rights mayors eventually fell, it is crucial to recognize that their administrations were in fundamental ways conservative. Men like David Dinkins, Tom Bradley and Harold Washington made city government ethnically and racially inclusive. They aligned themselves, unlike some of their predecessors, with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party on social issues, and they also called for massive federal initiatives for urban economic development. But such calls were not only largely symbolic—since the mayors did

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not have the power to push through large federal programs—they were in a way fatalistic. In both psychological and material ways, the dream of a second national war on poverty probably kept mayors from demanding more of their own city agencies. Rudy Giuliani's enormously successful policing reform, for instance, would have been unthinkable to a mayor who believed the only real way to address crime was a national effort to reduce poverty. And even more directly, mayors often budgeted for levels of federal and state aid they knew they had little chance of receiving, partly because they did not want to absolve Washington of its responsibilities and partly because doing so offered a way to evade tough fiscal choices. So while calling for dramatic change nationally, the civil rights mayors preserved the status quo at home—appeasing the municipal employee unions with generous contracts, using city jobs to cement their coalitions and leaving education, that most intractable and politically dangerous of urban problems, to elected school boards. As Raymond Horton, head of the business watchdog group the Citizens Budget Commission, told *Newsday* in the waning months of the Dinkins administration, "In New York, the political process has been captured by groups that have a vested interest in resisting change."

But in city after city over the past few years, the coalitions that elected the civil rights mayors have fallen apart, paving the way for the reformers. This has happened for three reasons. First, the money ran out. By the early 1990s, corporate and middle-class flight had decimated the tax bases in many urban areas, which meant that, even with high local taxes, city governments were finding it increasingly difficult to fund large, coalition-maintaining city payrolls. Meanwhile, the federal aid that had flowed from the 1950s through the 1970s declined substantially: between 1981 and 1993, annual assistance from the federal government dropped from $44.2 billion to $23.4 billion. Days after Bill Clinton took office, cash-starved mayors handed him a bill for $27 billion more a year to fund a blizzard of programs, explaining, in the words of J. Thomas Cochran, executive director of the United States Conference of Mayors, that "All we need is money." But the money did not come. And the civil rights mayors, like their immigrant-fueled machine predecessors, were unable to reform city management to cope with the new fiscal realities. In 1986, Chicago's Financial Research and Advisory Committee informed Mayor Harold Washington that the city's budget deficit would hit between $350 and $500 million by 1992 and suggested bringing competition into the delivery of city services to reduce costs. But Washington ignored the advice. Personnel costs in the city's police, fire, public works, road maintenance and garbage collection departments rose at more than four times the rate of inflation, and, by the time Richard Daley took office in 1989, the Advisory Committee was projecting a deficit of $827 million by 1995.

Ted Hershberg, director of the Center for Greater Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania, describes a similar pattern during Wilson Goode's final years in office: "Every year they would cook the books. They would estimate growth rates that they knew wouldn't materialize. They would keep carrying dollars over until the string ran out." It ran out in 1992. By that year, Goode's last in office, Philadelphia was roughly $250 million in debt, a figure that represented 10 percent of the city budget. Wall Street had downgraded Philadelphia's bonds to junk. The city was weeks from bankruptcy, and, when officials went to negotiate a bailout, financiers offered them an annual interest rate of 27 percent. Candidate Ed Rendell, who talked incessantly about using competition to reduce the city's costs (and who once in office refused to budget for unrealistically high levels of federal aid), won the race to succeed Goode because voters realized that only radical change could forestall fiscal ruin.

The second reason the civil rights coalitions fell apart is they failed to do what they had promised most loudly: to successfully arbitrate the new identity divisions that cities faced. David Dinkins's supporters didn't claim he would bring an efficiency revolution to city hall; they touted his sensitivity to New York's different constituencies, and his skill at brokering their competing concerns. Similarly, Joel Kotkin, a fellow at Pepperdine University's Institute for Public Policy, argues that "whites [in Los Angeles] elected a black mayor subconsciously at least to protect against another Watts." But, as Jim Sleeper argued in these pages four years ago (see "The End of the Rainbow," November 1, 1993), the identity pandering of Dinkins and others like him, combined with their passivity in the face of economic contraction, actually exacerbated racial and ethnic conflict. The riots in Crown Heights and South Central L.A. were devastating to the Dinkins and Bradley coalitions because they revealed that neither mayor's administration could respond effectively to any crisis, racial or otherwise. And that realization paved the way for Giuliani and Riordan to win by running as good managers rather than as racial healers.

The third reason the reformists took over was that, like the progressives at the turn of the century, they retained their middle-class base while distancing themselves from its racist, nativist and backward-looking elements. Republicans Giuliani and Riordan have strongly disassociated themselves from their party's attacks on immigrants, with Giuliani even going out of his way to call illegal immigrants "some of the hardest-working and most productive people in this city." One result has been that Giuliani, Riordan and conservative Democrat Richard Daley have each lured large numbers of Latino voters away from the political alliance with blacks that undergirded the elections of David Dinkins, Tom Bradley and Harold Washington. Riordan's success has been particularly striking. In winning re-election this spring, he garnered 60 percent of the Latino vote—this at a time when the California Republican Party's anti-immigrant rhetoric is driving droves of Latinos into the Democratic Party.

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More difficult to gauge has been the impact of Giuliani's and Riordan's repudiation of the Republican Party's agenda on social issues like abortion, gay rights and school prayer. But it has certainly played a role in their success with Jews, the one white ethnic group represented in the Dinkins and Bradley coalitions, and one whose liberalism is increasingly defined less by support for tax-and-spend economic policy and more by a fear of the moral agenda of the Christian right. Riordan won a stunning 71 percent of the traditionally Democratic Jewish vote in Los Angeles, and Giuliani's Jewish support is so strong that he will almost certainly take the group this fall—even against Jewish Democrat Ruth Messinger. Riordan and Giuliani have also gained support among middle- and upper-middle-class gays and feminists sympathetic to their economic and anticrime initiatives and willing to overlook their party labels because they have resolutely disavowed the GOP's stance on abortion and gay rights. Riordan, who marched in a gay pride rally soon after assuming office and appointed a prominent gay lawyer, Michael Keeley, as his chief of staff, won an impressive 41 percent of the gay and lesbian vote in his re-election bid this year.

But, although the reformers are tolerant of, and at ease with, their cities' different constituencies, their relationship to identity politics still differs substantially from that of their predecessors. While men like Bradley and Dinkins stressed their sensitivity to the distinct interests of various groups, talking at length of their connections to different communities, Riordan, Giuliani and the other reformers conspicuously reject the language of group interest. Underlying the reformers' almost breezy lack of interest in identity politics is a deep confidence that they can bypass divisive issues of race and ethnicity by simply making city government more effective: voters of every color want the garbage picked up and the streets made safe. It is their faith that such a thing as a public interest—as opposed to shifting coalitions of discrete group interests—exists in America's big cities that links today's reformers to those at the turn of the century and represents perhaps the crux of the dramatic shift in America's urban politics over the last decade.

For instance, Giuliani's redirection of New York's policing toward "quality of life" offenses required a strong belief that residents of every neighborhood share essentially the same hostility toward squeegee men, toward aggressive panhandling, toward public drunkenness, toward vandalism and toward disorderly conduct in general. As George Kelling, originator with James Q. Wilson of the "broken windows" policing model that Giuliani has carried out, puts it, he's "taken on the idea that one person's disorderly behavior is another person's lifestyle." The difference between Giuliani's and Dinkins's anticrime policies is not that Giuliani hired more cops: Dinkins hired 7,000 new police in his final years in office. What Dinkins would not do, according to celebrated former New York police chief William Bratton, was to reorient policing around a universal standard of nonviolent deviancy. "Dinkins," Bratton argues, "did not trust the police, particularly in minority neighborhoods, to deal with the quality of life issues." Similarly, Daley and Rendell have argued strenuously against efforts to cast their competition initiatives in racial and ethnic terms. After Chicago Alderman Robert Shaw called Daley's reforms "less than fair to one ethnic group, primarily African Americans," the mayor fumed to *Governing* magazine, "Minorities are taxpayers. They pay taxes in Chicago. You go out to a homeowner—who is black, Hispanic, female or Asian—they pay taxes. They're not concerned about their tax bill when I send it to them? I think they're very concerned about their tax bill." When critics charged that Mike White's competition initiative, Cleveland Competes, was anti-labor and anti-black, he responded: "Cleveland Competes is blind. It's probably blinder than Old Lady Justice because we don't care who wins [the contracts]. What we want is the best price."

The reformers have their faults. Critics say that, compared to the efforts of Norquist and Goldsmith, Riordan's and Giuliani's efficiency reforms have been timid. They note that it is still too early to tell whether White's and Daley's education initiatives will broadly raise achievement, or whether Philadelphia will ever really thrive again economically. They worry that new anticrime strategies are contributing to growing harassment of innocent African American youths. And there is truth in these cautionary reminders.

But considering that many believed five years ago that urban pathologies were structural and endemic—essentially beyond government's reach—the reformers' accomplishments are extraordinary. Giuliani has reduced crime in New York to a degree unimaginable when he took office four years ago. Riordan has presided over an impressive economic recovery in Los Angeles, with close to 50,000 new jobs created in the city in 1995 and 1996. Daley has taken control of Chicago's schools, cut 1,700 administrative positions, drastically reduced the cost of school maintenance by forcing seventeen different school employee unions to compete with private firms, eliminated a projected deficit of $1.3 billion and initiated a remedial summer school program that is showing some signs of success among Chicago's worst-performing students. In Philadelphia, Rendell has eliminated the city's huge budget deficit, saved over $20 million by introducing competition into thirty-three different city services, reduced taxes every year and raised the city's bond rating above junk. Cleveland's White has saved millions by reforming city garbage collection and road maintenance, and presided over a doubling of the city's job creation rate between 1990 and 1995. In Milwaukee, Norquist has kept both spending and taxes below the rate of inflation for nine straight years while receiving widespread

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Influ

CONCISE POTENT ENGAGING ORIGINAL BI-PARTISAN INTERACTIVE

Paul Simon

"To announce that we will welcome China's president and dictator when he comes (and I do not oppose that) but treat Taiwanese officials who are freely elected in a less generous way, sends a message to the world that the United States stands for freedom and democracy -- unless it offends a neighborhood bully." *from A-Hard-to-Believe -- But Unfortunately True -- Story, February 13, 1997*

of

Zbigniew Brzezinski

"What evidence is there that it risks worsening the American-Russian relationship? All of the apocalyptic predictions made by opponents of NATO expansion have proven to be either hysterical or simply false." *from An Idea Whose Time has Come, April 3, 1997*

Chester E. Finn, Jr.

"Where does the leader of the free world get the notion that a million amateurs will be able to accomplish something that 2.7 million professionals cannot manage?" *from Grading Clinton's Education Plan, March 20, 1997*

Nadine Strossen

"While our courts have been frustratingly inactive in enforcing civil rights, the courts' critics have nonetheless been hyperactive in their attacks, calling for everything from the impeachment of judges who issue politically unpopular rulings... to allowing Congress to overturn any judicial ruling it dislikes." *from Just Cause: Why We Need an Independent Judiciary, April 17, 1997*

days

George McGovern

"For many years we maintained a huge Cold War budget designed to enable us to fight and win a massive global struggle against the Soviet Union and China plus their communist allies. Nothing like this kind of military challenge faces the United States today." *from Needed: A Realistic Defense Budget, March 27, 1997*

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Celebrating

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ence

Compounding

ANNE APPLEBAUM FAREED ZAKARIA GARY L. BAUER NADINE STROSSEN

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acclaim for improving city services. Goldsmith has introduced competition into seventy-five different city services and saved Indianapolis more than $135 million, and on his watch city unemployment has fallen to below 3 percent.

These accomplishments should make the reformers rising stars within their parties. They are not; they are mostly outsiders. Giuliani's and Riordan's accommodationist positions on immigration, abortion and gay rights place them miles away from the social conservatives who exercise veto power in the national Republican Party. To gauge the distance, consider that, while last year Giuliani was celebrating illegal immigrants, the Republican Party platform advocated abolishing birthright citizenship. And, while the Christian Coalition ensured that no pro-choice candidate could be considered for the vice presidency, Giuliani defended "partial-birth" abortion. In fact, neither Giuliani nor Riordan even attended the Republican National Convention. Democrats quake at the prospect of running against either man in a statewide general election, but they don't have to worry—for either man to even consider doing so would provoke a deep crisis within the New York and California Republican Parties.

The Democrats are in essentially the same position. If the Christian Coalition is the single most important interest group in the Republican Party, the AFL-CIO is the most important one in the Democratic Party. And, as private-sector unionization has dropped in recent years, public employee unions, like the American Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, have grown more powerful within organized labor. Municipal employee unions are dead set against the introduction of competition into city services, and the introduction of competition into city services has been the bedrock principle that Daley, Rendell, White and Norquist have used in bringing their cities back from fiscal oblivion.

When Daley suggested introducing competition into the school system in 1994, for instance, he was opposed not only by the city unions, but by his own party's nominee for governor. In fact, Daley won the battle largely because Republicans, who generally admire the mayor, won both houses of the Illinois State Legislature that fall. If Daley's fellow Democrats had remained in control of even one house, they would likely have denied him the ability to make the reforms he wanted.

Rendell, facing a huge deficit upon taking office, fought bitterly to make city unions compete for service delivery. The unions ran ads calling his reforms anti-black, and most liberal Democratic politicians and commentators in Philadelphia lined up against him. Even when Rendell won re-election in 1995, with 77 percent of the vote, most city unions refused to endorse him.

In Milwaukee, Norquist's battles with his own party have been even more intense. After simply opposing Norquist in his first two runs for mayor, the city's municipal unions actually went out and recruited a candidate to run against him in his third. The most hostile, and the most powerful, has been the teachers union: the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC). The Norquist case highlights another issue on which the reformers' focus on competition isolates them within the Democratic Party: school choice. Norquist passionately supports Wisconsin's radical voucher plan, a plan he conceived in conjunction with Republican Governor Tommy Thompson and the Republicans in the state legislature over the opposition of the state's Democratic leadership. Norquist's stance has won him the undying hostility of WEAC, which fellow former state legislator and Norquist friend Tom Crawford calls "the most powerful political force in Wisconsin." Norquist has made noises about running for governor next year, but Crawford notes that, "In the Democratic primary, WEAC controls things. It's next to impossible for people who are moving along in their political careers to buck WEAC."

After years of anchoring the left wing of the Democratic Party, America's cities are in the early stages of creating something very different: reformist coalitions at odds with both parties. And the more an enduring reformist coalition emerges, the more pressure it will put on both parties. The reform mayors are heroes at places like the Cato Institute, but the Republican Party's base is in the South, and that base, with its conservative social and cultural agenda, will not welcome people like Rudy Giuliani or Richard Riordan as national party players, regardless of how many times they are re-elected. Much of the national Democratic Party is an ideologically empty vessel, and there are New Democrat, reinventing government types who would happily pour in something like the ideology espoused by John Norquist or Ed Rendell or Richard Daley. But, institutionally, the Democratic Party's most important interest group is organized labor, and, within organized labor, public-sector unions wield tremendous power. These unions would bolt a Democratic Party that backed school choice and competition in city services as quickly as the Christian Coalition would abandon a Republican Party that backed abortion and gay rights.

That said, both parties are clearly fragile, the Republicans because they are deeply divided over fundamental beliefs, and the Democrats because they no longer really have fundamental beliefs, at least not on economics. Party loyalty has been in steep decline, and the public appetite for a third party has grown remarkably. Perhaps since 1992, and certainly since 1994, thoughtful observers have speculated that America's partisan alignment is running on borrowed time. And then they have asked, what could generate a political metamorphosis? Part of the answer is surely the existence of a compelling political coalition that slices both parties down the middle. And, to that question, America's cities are beginning to offer an answer. •

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THE HARD QUESTIONS

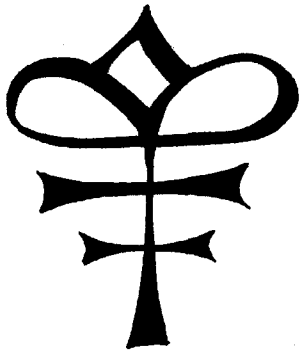
Getting a fix

As everyone knows, America's eternal war on drugs has inflicted collateral damage of immense proportions on black males. Over the last decade, the prison population has exploded with mostly young, non-white, inner-city males caught in the drug trade. In 1992 alone, two-thirds of those admitted to state prisons for drug offenses were black. And the number of black males held in prisons, as a proportion of the adult population, nearly doubled from 3.5 percent in 1985 to 6.7 percent in 1994. (The corresponding number for whites in 1994 was only 0.9 percent.)

Predictably, some academics and civil rights advocates have decried this trend. In his book *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime and Punishment in America*, Michael Tonry, a criminologist at the University of Minnesota, offers a wealth of data to show that the war on drugs caused arrests to rise more rapidly among blacks than whites during the late 1980s. He concludes that the national drug policy is immoral, precisely because of its racially disparate effects. Similarly, some civil libertarians have denounced the mandatory minimum sentences for federal drug offenses because they single out for harsher treatment those (mostly blacks) who traffic in crack cocaine. Possessing as little as five grams (about $500 worth) of crack carries a five-year mandatory minimum sentence, while it takes *100 times as much* cocaine to trigger the same automatic sentence.

Although superficially appealing, these charges of racial discrimination are ultimately unpersuasive. There is nothing necessarily pernicious about a war on drugs that hits inner-city traffickers hardest. If one is to fight the drug trade, one must go where the action is, and the action is often in black neighborhoods. Economic logic and accidents of history conspire to make low-income, inner-city neighborhoods ideal locations for drug peddlers. A clandestine commerce can flourish with relative impunity in disorganized communities with abandoned property, a substantial population of transients and easy access to major highways. (Street prostitution is also rampant in these areas and, like drug peddling, quite rare in upper-middle-class suburbs.) And because buyers and sellers cannot openly advertise their locations, they must make an educated guess. So once an area acquires the reputation of being a good place to "score," it is likely to remain one.

This makes life hell for law-abiding folks, largely poor and black, who are struggling to raise their children in these neighborhoods. Which is why, as Randall Kennedy of Harvard Law School argues in his book *Race, Crime and the Law*, a policy targeted at retail drug traffickers can, despite its impact on black incarceration rates, also provide disproportionate benefits to black communities. Nothing is more certain to signal that the forces of lawlessness and disorder have won out over those of decency and security than the flourishing of an open-air drug market on neighborhood streets.



There is also nothing *necessarily* wrong with the more severe treatment of crack in sentencing laws. Crack cocaine is a highly addictive, severely debilitating drug that has wreaked havoc on inner-city communities across the country. The crack trade, a lucrative and deadly business in ghetto America, brings with it an alarming level of violence, with profoundly deleterious consequences for residents of these communities.

No, the simple fact of a racially disparate incidence of punishment should not foreclose an otherwise effective law enforcement strategy that is color-blind on its face. But is the current strategy really working? This is a critical question because, while disparate racial results are not disqualifying per se, they are nevertheless undesirable. Locking up an ever larger proportion of the adult male residents of inner-city neighborhoods constitutes a cost to society, and this cost must be placed alongside the benefits of a policy to determine its desirability.

Accumulating evidence demonstrates that the punitive anti-drug crusade of the last decade is, in fact, not producing benefits commensurate with its substantial costs. Indeed, the price of illegal drugs is falling, not rising—and drugs are still available on street corners and in alleyways. Moreover, despite the disparate treatment of crack in federal and some state laws (California's, for example), recent research by Jonathan Caulkins of Carnegie Mellon University has shown that the street prices of crack and powder cocaine are about the same. If so, then the strenuous efforts to target trafficking in crack have had little effect on its supply and thus overall distribution.

Given such evidence, Peter Reuter, a leading drug policy analyst at the University of Maryland's School of Public Affairs, recently argued that our drug policy is now too punitive. In a speech delivered in February to the National Institute of Justice titled "Can We Make Prohibition Work Better?," Reuter contended that we could "mitigate the harshness of our [drug] policies with little risk of seeing an expansion of drug use and related problems." If, indeed, we can do so, there is a strong argument that we should. Such a mitigation would allow federal and state judges the flexibility to give shorter sentences to retail drug sellers; police to de-emphasize the arrest of users for simple possession; and states to shift at least some resources from punishment into prevention and treatment. According to Reuter, of the $30 billion now spent annually on drug control (up sharply from $6 to $7 billion in 1985), fully three-quarters is directed at apprehending and punishing dealers and users, while only about one-sixth is going to treatment.

That these particulars read suspiciously like a political liberal's wish list does not make them wrong. Nor does the fact that inner-city drug traffickers are not choirboys mean that imprisoning them is an effective way to deal with the drug problem. The fear of appearing "soft" on the drug issue has had a deleterious effect on the quality of our public debate in this area. As UCLA drug policy expert Mark Kleiman has stressed, drug enforcement differs from other kinds of law enforcement in that "locking up a burglar ... does not materially change the opportunities for other burglars, while locking up a drug dealer leaves potential customers for new dealers."

The prostitution analogy is apt. Do we really want to pursue a policy—targeting street-level retail dealers for mandatory prison terms—that imposes great costs on a vulnerable part of society while accomplishing little in objective terms? Is this not too high a price to pay in order to provide politicians with a symbol of their righteous determination to "do something" about a problem which, at its root, lies in the consumption habits of the society, rather than in the criminality of its impoverished, urban youth?

GLENN C. LOURY

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Old Places, New Looks

It is set in Israel—Nazareth and Jerusalem. Almost all the characters are Palestinian. Here are some of the scenes, at random:

The opening shot, before credits, is a huge mass, dimly lit, unrecognizable. The camera moves around it, the light grows, and it becomes an immense close-up of a man's head resting on his hand, sleeping.

First scene after the credits: an elderly woman comes into a living room, sits on a sofa facing us, and complains at length about the behavior of a relative. Then another elderly woman comes in, says nothing, and the two go out together.

Two men sit outside their gift and postcard shop in the sun. A group of Japanese tourists pass between them and us. One of the tourists stops to take a picture of the two men, then leaves.

A group of elderly women sit around a kitchen table, working. They discuss the peeling of garlic.

A man sits at a kitchen table working on something with small tools. From time to time he glances at a tennis match on TV, which we hear but do not see.

In a long shot a car pulls up in front of a country store. Two men get out and start to fight fiercely. Men come out of the store and separate them. The two men get back in the car and drive off.

Later, same long shot, another car stops in front of that store; two men get out and fight. Men run out of the store and stop them, reproving a father for hitting his son. The father and son get back in the car and drive off.

Still later, same long shot, another car pulls up in front of the store. Two men get out, simply change places in the front seat, and drive off.

An Orthodox priest on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, speaking Russian (I think)—all others speak Arabic—says that this is the water on which Christ walked. Now, he says, the sea is so full of the excrement of German and American tourists that anyone could walk on it.

The film is called **Chronicle of a Disappearance** (International), a first feature by Elie Suleiman, a Palestinian who was born in 1960 in Nazareth. Suleiman spent a dozen years in New York, studying film and making a few shorts, then returned to Nazareth. In 1994, he moved to Jerusalem and took a post at Bir Zeit University. The scenes sketched above, a few out of many, take place in Nazareth; here are a few set in Jerusalem:

In a conference room Suleiman himself is announced to speak about his aesthetic criteria. When he steps to the microphone, the p.a. system yowls with feedback. Repeated attempts to correct the trouble don't help. He never speaks.

A young Palestinian woman called Adan, very mod-looking, who lives in East Jerusalem, makes telephone calls trying to find an apartment in another part of the city. She mentions that she's Arab, and people hang up; or they hear that she speaks Hebrew with a foreign accent and they hang up.

Adan, with a walkie-talkie, sends a lot of phony commands to police patrol cars. A hopeless mix-up results.

Suleiman is sitting quietly at home when two members of an Israeli SWAT team break in and begin to search the apartment. Suleiman, unfrightened, silent, courteous, allows them to proceed. They pass through the apartment and leave.

Adan is arrested and taken off. She and her captors are silent and calm, as if they were all doing a rehearsed scene.

We see a swimming pool with a large head of Arafat on the wall behind it. A swimmer is doing laps in the pool.

Back in Nazareth (I think) we are in a living-room, watching from behind an elderly couple who face a TV set. The announcer says that the day's programs are finished. On the screen appears a rippling Israeli flag, and a band plays "Hatikvah" all the way through. The couple sit there; then the camera comes around, and we see that they are both asleep.

After almost every scene in both cities, an inter-title appears: "A Day Later." The words are especially pungent in Nazareth, where it's hard to tell whether it's a day later or a day earlier or a week ago or a year later. In Jerusalem, the inter-title has a bit more point, except that the deadpan conduct in almost every scene works, quite intentionally, against any sense of dramatic swell.

From the gabby old woman at the start, and almost unbrokenly throughout, what sustains this film is Suleiman's intelligent, taciturn wit. This is especially incisive considering the touchiness of his subjects. He has a real talent for astringent implication, thus depending on the kind of viewers who want to play his delicate game—and respond to its purpose.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Brassed Off. *A coal miners' brass band, Yorkshire, 1992, as emblem of labor struggles. Mixed treacle and truth. (Reviewed 6/9/97)* **The Designated Mourner.** *Wallace Shawn's extraordinary writing—an insidious elegy for civilization—makes this piece for three speakers deeply moving. Mike Nichols is particularly fine. (3/24/97)* **Night Falls on Manhattan.** *Another Sidney Lumet "theater" film about New York crime, corruption, and the struggle for municipal honesty. Not Lumet's best but well worth the time. (6/16/97)* **La Promesse.** *Quietly tremendous. A youth in a frantic Belgian city discovers that there is more to his life than he imagined—through the life of an African woman in the city's foreign workers' slum. (5/26/97)* **—SK**

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Instead of one more passage through materials that are all too grimly familiar, he presents them for viewers who know the facts but who will appreciate a fresh aspect. (I was cheered to note that among the many sponsors of the film listed at the end were the Israeli Ministry of Culture and the American National Endowment for the Arts.)

Chronicle of a Disappearance is a film of the Absurd. If Ionesco had been a Palestinian and a filmmaker, he might have made it. By treating these subjects almost in the abstract, by working every scene against conventional expectations of growth and cumulation, by refusing to blink at the touch of the ridiculous in all tragedy, Suleiman refreshes us. He mocks nothing, but, like all good Absurdists, he looks at things bifocally: from the point of view of a fly on the wall and under the eye of eternity.

Chronicle of a Disappearance had its American premiere in June at the Anthology Film Archives in New York; in June, too, it will be in San Francisco at the Arab Film Festival, and in July at the Jewish Film Festival in the same city. It will also play in some other American cities. It ought to play in more. It's a gem.

The French writer-director Cédric Klapisch also studied film in New York and made shorts here, then went home—in his case to Paris. His third feature, **When the Cat's Away** (Sony Pictures Classics), is a comedy set in Paris—soaked in Paris is more like it. Like Suleiman, Klapisch went abroad to polish his skill for dealing with what was waiting at home.

The film's basic idea is nicely simple: a young woman who is going off on a holiday boards her beloved cat with an old woman who has lots of them. Somehow the boarded cat is lost—runs off. Most of the film consists of the young woman's encounters and adventures as, helped by others, she searches for her cat all around her *arrondissement* (the 11th). In these adventures she meets various people; as well, the film gives the viewer a whiff of Paris perfume.

It's all bright and sprightly. Klapisch directs and edits with insistent freshness. At first his picture feels like a recrudescence of the New Wave. Then we sense that this new film is older than that. The repeated views of the roofs, the neighborhood search for something that's lost—why, it's René Clair, *Sous les toits de Paris* and *Le Million*.

Clair, but with a difference. There's one touch that could be called postmodern. The young woman herself, unlike what we might expect, is not very attractive and has just enough acting ability to get her from one end of the script to the other without total collapse. Either Klapisch made a major mistake in choosing her, which seems unlikely in light of the other casting, or it was a deliberate dissonant choice—to show us that he is no slave of tradition, Clair or no Clair. We are by now well used to leading men with talent but no particular beauty—Dustin Hoffman and Walter Matthau, for starters—but if Klapisch was attempting to follow suit on the female side (an admirable idea), why not a young woman of manifest ability? •

Finite Jest

BY ALEXANDER STAR

A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments by David Foster Wallace

(Little, Brown, 353 pp., $23.95)

Infinite Jest by David Foster Wallace

(Little, Brown, 1,079 pp., $14.95 paper)

Most novelists strive to extinguish the traces of juvenile self-consciousness from their work. Self-consciousness is an adolescent twitch, a mannered style, a way of holding back from the potency of one's materials. It's an obstacle to communication, and a low form of candor. David Foster Wallace is not such a writer. He can't escape from self-consciousness; or he doesn't want to. Instead, he makes the sheer awkwardness of carrying a self through the world the central theme of his madly exfoliating compositions. The unpleasant sensation of being looked at and the corresponding urge to hide are the torments that drive his work into labyrinths of ever greater complexity. At any moment, his prose seems about to collapse under the mere strain of being visible.

Since the publication of his novel *Infinite Jest* last year, Wallace has become rather visible himself, lauded and mocked as a recklessly verbose chronicler of drug addiction, daytime television, and the unsettling distractions of high technology and halogen-lit trauma. To his detractors, he is the monstrous progeny of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, a fidgety, immature observer of his generation's media-saturated anomie, the perpetrator of "the grunge novel." To his admirers, he is a verbal magician, conjuring up a grimly hilarious landscape of TV-induced hallucinations and congenitally stunted characters.

In fact, Wallace's accomplishments are more considerable—and more volatile—than either of these estimations proposes. With implacable resolve, he tries to write intimate, heartfelt fiction about a nation overrun with information and images, and inhabited by an "atomized mass of self-conscious watchers and appearers." The urge to withdraw from this unhappy state of affairs and the compulsion to know about it are kept in a state of permanent revolution. With a weird kind of energy, he reaches out toward the very surfaces from which he shrinks.

The result is a *very* peculiar body of work. Often enough, it appears Wallace is simply trying to sabotage himself. He wants to explode the literature of "trendy, sardonic exhaustion" and "reflexive irony," but to do so he weaves a thick sardonic skein of irony into his work. He wants to take off the "empty, jaded mask" of the media-saturated citizen, but he keeps putting it back on again. His warmest episodes are scattered with cruel digressions. Yet Wallace's self-demolitions are not as pointless as they may seem. He hopes to satirize "everything that is clichéd and hyped and empty and banal," and to show the presence of actual human beings in this sad landscape, and to do this he extends himself widely and deeply. The results can be overinflated, glibly superior, just plain irritating. But in his best work—in his big novel, especially—Wallace is a far more empathetic, tangible and vivid writer than his self-undermining methods may suggest.

Infinite Jest is a massive assemblage that creeps forward at an awkward gait, typically at cross-purposes with itself. It is an earnest and compassionate novel about

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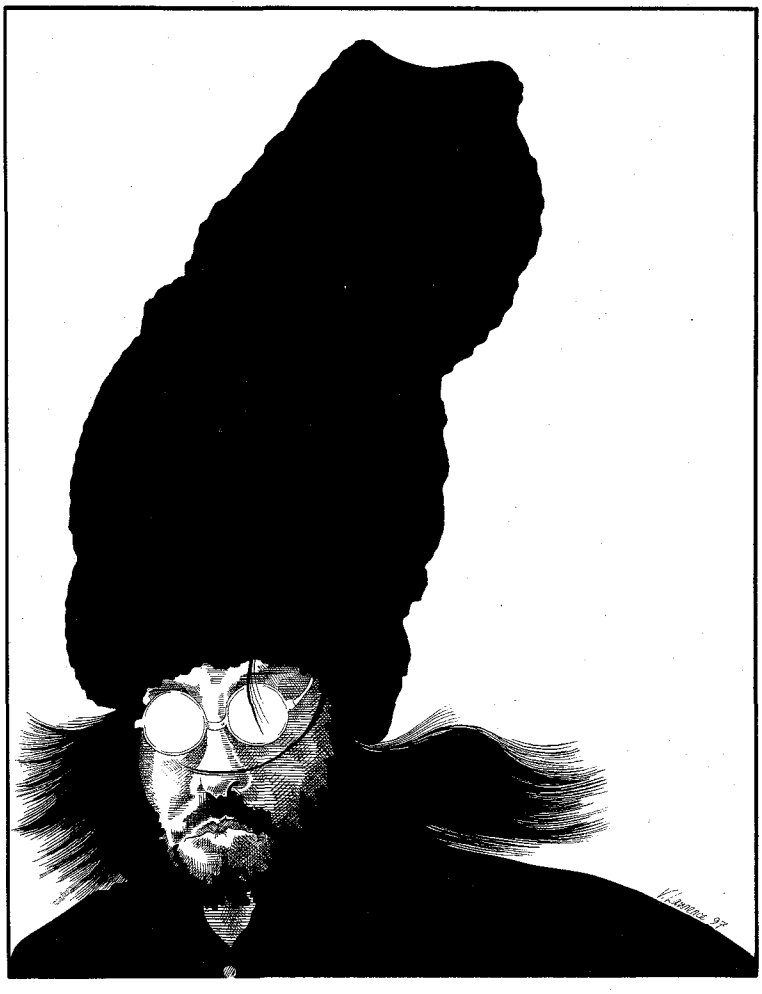
the mutual incomprehension between fathers and sons; a painstaking study of addicts' stumbling efforts at recovery; and a solemn protest against the necessity of being seen in a culture that is obsessed with appearances. It is also a deliberately frustrating and sometimes malevolent compilation of satire, which often reads more like a madcap encyclopedia of grotesque violence, shaggy-dog sagas and self-reflexive pranks than a story that might ever near its end. Wallace piles up vast banks of information and takes them down again. He generates a wave of emotion and then puts it behind a pane of shatterproof glass.

Inevitably, a novel such as *Infinite Jest* gets compared to *Gravity's Rainbow*, but in this case the comparison is reasonably apt. Like Pynchon, Wallace wants to make the esoteric vocabularies of science and technology touch the pulpy languages of pop culture; and like Pynchon, he situates his characters in the midst of inscrutable conspiracies and counterconspiracies, a world in which everyone looks like they are "at least a double agent." Both books take the form of a meandering, endlessly interrupted quest: in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for the rocket that heralds a new order of "money and death"; in *Infinite Jest*, for a lethally addictive entertainment cartridge whose circulation precipitates a "continental emergency." Finally, each novel contains its own half-buried democratic philosophy: in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Puritan heresy which insists that the "Preterite" are saved; in *Infinite Jest*, the belief that every side-character must have a speaking part, and become "the rational and articulate protagonist of his own drama." Where Wallace most departs from Pynchon is in his approach to characterization. His major characters are not as brittle and as schematized as the worlds they live in. Instead, Wallace tries to give them an accumulating emotional resonance.

Like many experimental novels, *Infinite Jest* doesn't suffer from an absence of plots so much as from an excess of them, mostly set in the near future, inside a vaguely dystopian America where drastic political and environmental rearrangements have taken place while the surface of everyday life remains roughly intact. The novel's setting is the low-rent districts of metropolitan Boston, which Wallace portrays in precise and affecting detail: the seedy streets and storefronts of Inman Square and Allston, the trash compactors behind the Boston Public Library, the "Depressed Residential" three-deckers, the imaginary and dismal "gray line" subway that runs from Watertown to Cambridge.



DAVID FOSTER WALLACE BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

On the edges of this world sit two institutions, each inhabited by refugees from a nation given over to a debilitating fascination with "watching and being watched." The Enfield Tennis Academy is a school for precocious children with the "aluminum sheen" of the privileged, and the Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House is a gathering place for a motley array of recovering addicts: a verbose college professor, a sleazy coke dealer, a suicidal data-entry clerk. Most of the novel's characters swarm around these settings, where they subject their battered psyches to elaborate forms of discipline.

In the background, however, a different kind of novel develops: a kind of slow-motion send-up of a techno-political thriller. With Vonnegut-like weirdness, Wallace reveals that the United States and Canada have merged into the Organization of North American Nations, a.k.a. ONAN; large areas of Quebec and northern New England have become a vast toxic waste dump; and the United States is ruled by a former nightclub crooner named Johnny Gentle, whose "Clean U.S." Party unites xenophobes and environmentalists in the pursuit of a "tighter, tidier nation." Into this surreal geopolitical situation arrive rumors of a mysterious videotape that paralyzes its viewers with pleasure, leaving them in a subverbal, near catatonic state. A wheelchair-bound Québecois terrorist and a drag-wearing ONANite agent launch parallel campaigns to find the tape, which becomes known to them as "the samizdat" or "the entertainment"—as well as by its true name, Infinite Jest.

Wallace's most significant gift is the comic dexterity of his prose, a bizarre organism that manages to feed on its own many contradictions. His sentences are elaborate constructions, packed with jokes, information, all manner of narrative twists and turns, and occasional stabs at beauty. But not too many. With a kind of systematic cunning, Wallace resists conventional eloquence, or even its echo. Instead, he endeavors to employ virtually all the silliest and ugliest colloquialisms in the American tongue. Again and again he forces dead technical language to yield unexpectedly vivid meanings ("Ruth vanCleve's chatter is as listener-interest-independent as anything Kate Gompert's heard") or ridiculous euphemisms (a woman explains that her drug dealer boyfriend is in prison for "operating a pharmaceutical company without a license"). When participants in a tennis tournament are told to "justify your seed," no implication of the phrase is left unnoticed.

Wallace writes with particular relish of the vague notational ways in which information is transmitted in a culture that's

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sick with the stuff. Midway through the novel, the teenage tennis player Hal Incandenza reflects that "recreational drugs are more or less traditional at any U.S. secondary school, maybe because of the unprecedented tensions: post-latency and puberty and angst and impending adulthood, etc. To help manage the intra-psychic storms, etc." Later, when Hal arrives at the door of a deserted institutional building, he finds that "there is no obvious bell, but the doors are unlocked. They open in that sort of pressurized way of institutional doors. The savanna-colored lobby is broad and still and has a vague medical-dental smell. Its carpet's a dense low tan Dacronyl weave that evacuates sound. There's a circular high-countered nurse's station or reception desk, but nobody's there."

Wallace specializes in this particular blend of offhandedness and precision. He mimics the fatigued, indifferent mannerisms of everyday speech, even as he describes a predicament or a place with almost forensic accuracy. And he applies the same methods to thought itself. He likes to show how a long line of argument can twist or turn, plummeting in midair and then righting itself again. Wallace's characters think compulsively; but they can't think straight.

Much of Wallace's novel tries to coax humor and pathos out of its own convolutions. Important events happen as if by accident, and no one notices them. Emotions are hidden in mounds of information. Pitiless, recursive loops are everywhere: a hospital patient who has been struck dumb finds that "without a pencil and notebook he couldn't even seem to get across a request for a notebook and pencil"; a self-help group urges its members to don veils in order to be "open" about the need to hide; a potent street drug is said to be like "acid that has itself dropped acid"; two people who recognize each other in a revolving door swirl around and around forever, trying to meet.

But can Wallace have his human beings and his anti-humanism at once? The premise of his fiction is that nothing takes place on purpose, that the world is composed of grotesque and comic coincidences, that all of his characters are in the grip of overwhelming infantile needs that rob them of their will and, ultimately, of their consciousness. At the same time, his characters speak frequently of the difficult struggle to make choices and to accept the responsibility for making them. Even under the worst of circumstances, they look for "guides" to follow and "values" to affirm. In this way, Wallace practices both the art of black comedy and the art of moral realism. Those are very different aesthetics; but, even if they don't fuse into a single tone or style, he does pursue each of them with great faithfulness.

Wallace assembles a large cast for his complex "entertainment." Dr. James Incandenza, the late founder of the Enfield Tennis Academy, is the ghost who hovers over the banquet. After developing the physics of "cold annular fusion," he had invested his considerable earnings in the creation of a sports academy, before turning to a new career as a director of opaque experimental films. Wallace devotes a long, and meticulously detailed, footnote to Incandenza's filmography: There's *Death in Scarsdale, The American Century as Seen Through a Brick,* and *The Joke,* in which audience members are unwittingly invited to watch themselves on a screen until they get fed up and walk out. When the last moviegoer leaves, the film is over. Even as Wallace has a lot of fun parodying the "anti-empathetic" obscurities of avant-garde cinema, he incorporates Incandenza's aesthetics into his own: an unmistakably "anti-confluential" approach to narrative, or the tenet of "radical realism" that even the most peripheral character must enjoy a moment in the footlights.

Several years before the novel's action begins, the director acquires the delu-

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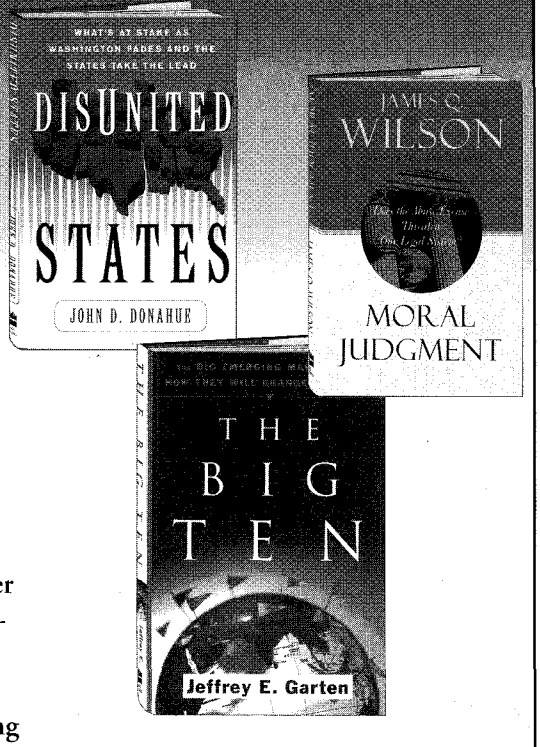

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sion that his son Hal—a "lexical prodigy" and talented tennis player—cannot speak. Distraught by his son's apparent silence, he smothers his sorrow with Wild Turkey before killing himself by intruding his head into a microwave. The unhappy Hal is left without a father and with a daily habit of "getting high in secret." Much of the novel charts the growing sadness that gradually removes him from the world. "Why is Hal sad?" is the simple, plainly put question that reverberates through the book.

Hal's surviving family members certainly give him little relief. His mother is an icy linguist who once organized the "militant grammarians of America"; his oldest brother, Orin, is a relentless womanizer who betrayed the family tradition of tennis playing to become a star punter in the NFL. Hal's closest confidante is his brother Mario, a badly deformed midget who is not retarded but "ever so slightly epistemologically bent," and whose kindness wins him affection as a "(semi)-walking miracle."

The school itself is a place of recreational drugs and unrecreational sports, its medieval curriculum designed to create professional athletes who can make a living on the commercial circuit of "the show." With considerable ingenuity, Wallace weaves endless riffs on the possibilities and pathologies of competitive sport: the lonely kid from the Midwest who wins tennis tournaments by bringing along a rifle and threatening to shoot himself if he loses; the blind player who judges his shots by the sound of the ball alone; the German coach who elaborates a metaphysical system out of the borders of the court and the boundaries of the self.

But Wallace isn't only concerned with the grim comedy of enforced play. He also investigates the mundane troubles of being an adolescent in a confined environment. He wraps enormous amounts of technical information about tennis and drugs around an unhappy prep-school fable of school kid-taunting, furtive drug-taking and student-teacher seduction. As ever, he shuttles back and forth between the "infantile and gooprone" and the baroquely, extravagantly cerebral. His writing has the information-density of an encyclopedia at one moment, and the lurching awkwardness of a child's scribble at the next. And that's especially so when he's writing about Hal Incandenza, his shy and precocious teenager. For all his intelligence, Hal's desires are painfully straightforward: he wants to speak with his own voice, and to go to college. Neither of these ambitions is achieved.

Down the hill, Ennet House provides the setting for a different collage of affecting portraiture and jaded parody. Here Wallace invents an ingathering of addicts, who tell their various stories of desperation and recovery. The characters who migrate in and out of Ennet abuse a vast array of different substances: oral narcotics, heroin, marijuana, alcohol. In the novel's early pages, they drift toward the halfway house, living through their inexorable "decline and fall." Once there, they live under the benevolent eye of Don Gately, a 29-year-old ex-addict who is built like a bus, and presides over the desperations and the quarrels of the inmates with a quiet, collected dignity.

At the heart of *Infinite Jest* are the recovery meetings that the House residents attend. These scenes are small masterpieces of collective disclosure and digression. Wallace shows his addicts alternating between involvement and detachment, and the brilliance of his storytelling is that he makes both of these stances seem like equally valid options. Wallace wants to register everything phony and off-putting about a recovery meeting; and to suggest with earnest humility that perhaps "it just works, is all." He coils together the affecting and the absurd in ever more elaborate diagrams of confession and comedy.

Gately, a onetime thief as well as an abuser of oral narcotics, is the Everyman whom Wallace follows through the world of recovery. Gately is put off by the clichéd slogans, the allusions to a "higher power," the numbing speeches that are "head-clutchingly prolix and involved." He recognizes that the recovery movement's logic implies that every kind of behavior can be understood as an addiction, including the habit of going to recovery meetings themselves. Still, he listens intently to the testimony that he hears in the "broad cold salad bar'd" halls, and finds that when an addict talks about "this Substance you thought was your one true friend," or remembers drinking her way to the "old two-option welfare hotel window-ledge," the words are generally harrowing and sincere. An addict's story "has to be the truth to really go over, here," he notes. "It can't be a calculated crowd-pleaser, and it has to be the truth unslanted, unfortified. And maximally unironic. An ironist in a Boston A.A. meeting is a witch in church. Irony-free zone."

What's particularly Wallace-like about the recovery scenes, though, is that the addicts' stories often begin as candidly painful narratives, and then run off the rails into a kind of hideous slapstick violence. When a woman tries to throw herself off the John Hancock building, she is blown by a gust of hot air into an office on the thirty-first floor. When the son of a joke-shop proprietor gives his mother a birthday present, he actually kills her with a defective gag. At one meeting, Wallace relates the truly sickening and utterly sardonic story of a "totally paralyzed and retarded and catatonic" girl whose father puts a Raquel Welch mask on her face each night before raping her.

Eventually *Infinite Jest* comes to resemble a kind of manic Icelandic saga in which each character is introduced with a long testimonial to the bloody events of his or her youth. Only here the bloodshed doesn't involve the slaying of servants and priests: much of it sounds like something you'd hear about on an episode of Montel Williams sponsored by the OED. Wallace's America is a republic of the dysfunctional and the deformed. The novel's overture is the speech that a radio DJ named Madame Psychosis delivers over the MIT radio station WYYY: "Come on down," she intones, extending an invitation to the "phrenologically malformed. The suppuratively lesioned. The endoncrinologically malodorous of whatever ilk.... Run don't walk on down. The acervulus-nosed. The radically-ectomied. The morbidly diaphoretic with a hankie in every pocket. The chronically granulomatous ... the hated and dateless and shunned, who keep to the shadows. Those who undress only in front of their pets.... "

What, precisely, is Wallace trying to accomplish by all this? Isn't this winking catalog of cartoon violence and disease exactly what the literature of "reflexive irony" and "trendy sardonic exhaustion" is all about? At worst, Wallace uses the deformations of his characters as a kind of crutch; when in doubt about how to proceed with his novel, he resorts to inventing one more hideous tale that could have been lifted from the pages of an alternative comic book or Re/Search publications's *Modern Primitives*. His characters may be hideously disfigured, but, after several hundred pages, there doesn't seem to be anything improbable about their condition anymore. They are exactly alike in their crippled condition of defeat.

But Wallace gets more out of these stories than that. He wants to use the devices of fringe-culture sensationalism to get at a reservoir of real feeling that his characters share. The external disfigurations are a mark of some internal trauma, a terror of being seen in a culture obsessed with appearances and

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watching. This is the burden of self-consciousness that Wallace wants the reader to share, and that he writes about with directness and humor. It is a burden that weighs heavily on Hal, who imagines what it's like to be too emotionally tangled and physically grotesque to be viewed in public: "... to be really human (at least as he conceptualizes it) is probably to be unavoidably sentimental and naïve and goo-prone and generally pathetic, is to be in some quite basic interior way forever infantile, some sort of not-quite-right looking infant dragging itself anaclitically around the map, with big wet eyes and froggy-soft skin, huge skull, gooey drool."

In his habit of zooming back and forth between the intimate and the grotesque, Wallace brings to mind a number of other contemporary novelists, such as William T. Vollman and A.M. Homes. Like Wallace, they pack their work with pathology, hoping to charge their art with the genuine shock of extreme experience and the lurid comedy of its overexposure. This approach has its dangers, ranging from the spurious impulse to identify nobility and suffering to the equally spurious impulse to present weird, tabloid-like scenarios with condescension and scorn. The fascination with "weirdness" can become an excuse to avoid the need to think critically, to analyze the oddity into its elements. Unlike so many of his peers, Wallace evades those traps, largely because he renders Hal and Gately as complex individuals, their "goo-prone" and adult selves somehow coexisting inside the same body.

But if Wallace grants Hal and Gately their humanity, he does not allow them to keep it for long. Finally both of his central characters slip away toward nothingness, toward the author's own private nightmare: the "death of lexical speech." Hal's father had once believed that his son could not speak, and now Hal finds that words really have failed him. Hal tries to give up smoking pot, but his efforts lead nowhere. After a hilarious visit to a men's movement meeting, he fades out of the narrative, succumbing to a growing sadness. Wallace treats this falling away with intimacy and care. As Hal's father foretold, he is "retreating to the periphery of life's frame."

A similar fate befalls Gately. After being beaten to a pulp by an angry mob outside Ennet House, Gately lies in a hospital bed, flickering in and out of consciousness. As Québecois commandos bear down on the tennis academy, and Hal slips further into silence, he tumbles beneath the threshold of human communication. His hospital room becomes the scene of a tragicomic bedside vigil as a parade of visitors passes through: Ennet residents, who tell long stories about the minutiae of their tedious lives; the ravishing, veiled Joelle van Dyne, who comes to find Gately "romantic and heroic"; the hospital's terrifying doctor, who tempts him to ingest the very oral narcotic that he swore off in recovery; and—in a final flourish—the ghost of Hal's father, who flickers around the room, speaking obsessively, and sadly, of his failed relationship with his son. Gately is reduced to a state of complete passivity; he can only listen to the word-drunk, anguished souls that speak to him. He is a "huge, empty confessional booth" or a "statue of an ear."

Observing Gately's demise, Wallace orchestrates this subsiding of sentience very well. He has a gift for describing what it's like for a room to blur at the edges, or for words to lose their meaning and become part of an ambient surround:

> He dreams he's riding due north on a bus the same color as its own exhaust, passing again and again the same gutted cottages and expanse of heaving sea, weeping.... He dreams he looks in a mirror and sees nothing and keeps trying to clean the mirror with his sleeve. One dream consists only of the color blue, too vivid, like the blue of a pool. An unpleasant smell keeps coming up his throat. He's both in a bag and holding a bag.

Many readers have complained about *Infinite Jest*'s bitterly pessimistic ending. Hal's loss of speech, Gately's prospects of recovery, the resolution of the "continental emergency" that follows the circulation of the fatal "Entertainment": all of these plotlines are left hanging in the air, mysteries that refuse to be solved. (Some readers will probably spend decades combing the book for clues.) In many ways, however, the drive toward oblivion is the novel's proper end. Wallace can only hold together his commitments to genuine feelings, and to the ironic deflation of those feelings, by imagining a space where neither one is possible. When he gets there, the effect is oddly lulling, a song that's faded out. In an Enfield term paper, Hal had predicted that after the "bureaucratic hero" of postmodernism there would arise the "hero of non-action," who is "one beyond calm, divorced from all stimulus." For all its hectic verve and incessant noise, *Infinite Jest* drives toward passivity and the cessation of action, toward a calm that lies somewhere between peacefulness and death. But not, of course, without protest: on the bus back from a tennis meet, the students read the immobile

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adventures of Oblomov, and they appear, we are told, "very unhappy indeed."

Whatever its other distinctions, Wallace's nonfiction is nearly as ambitious as his fiction. In *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*, he gathers essays and travelogues written over the course of the decade. They include lengthy excursions into the mind of David Lynch, the state of the novel in an age of television, and the uses of leisure time on a cruise ship holiday. Throughout the collection, Wallace paints a morose portrait of a TV-addled society obsessed with "watching and being watched." He also paints—it must be said—an equally morose portrait of himself. Wallace apologizes for losing track of his thesis; he convicts himself of being just as "aloof and sardonic and depressed" as the "hip young rebels" he complains about; and he confesses that he is just as concerned with how he appears to others as the cruise ship conformists he derides. The book might have been called *Advertisements Against Myself.*

As a reporter, Wallace practices a rather original brand of anti-journalism. He wants to watch, but he doesn't want to be seen. Like Hal, the frightened writer seems to retreat to the periphery of the room. In a profile of David Lynch, he explains that "[I] have no idea how to interview somebody." Visiting the Illinois State Fair, he avoids the rides, wanly pointing out that his chief goal in life is to "subject my nervous system to as little stress as possible." And his grand cruise ship adventure ends with a sullen retreat to his cabin. Hobbled by his hesitation, Wallace too often resorts to cheap caricature: the cruise ship passengers are a mass of "ectoplasm," the crowds at the state fair resemble a "Batan march of docile consumption." These are artfully turned banalities, mistakenly presented as if they were brilliantly derisive witticisms. It's hard to distinguish the scorn from the self-pity.

Still, Wallace's essays add up to a fine portrait of odd American detail. In the windswept plains of central Illinois, the inhabitants "[don't] comb their hair because why bother?" David Lynch's mailbox contains a "fresh shrink-wrapped copy of Jack Nicklaus's instructional video *Golf My Way*. Your guess is as good here as mine." Most memorable of all, perhaps, is Wallace's description of his cruise ship cabin's "fascinating and potentially malevolent" vacuum toilet: Its "concussive suction" is "so awesomely powerful that it's both scary and strangely comforting—your waste seems less removed than *hurled* from you, and hurled with a velocity that lets you feel as though the waste is going to end up someplace so far away from you that it will have become an abstraction."

It is when Wallace turns from the description of scenes and people to the analysis of ideas and artifacts that his weaknesses are most evident. Wallace's essays on contemporary fiction's flirtation with television and on David Lynch are full of arresting ideas, but they are frustrating performances, overcrowded with inflated arguments and randomly generated complications. Wallace makes being difficult all too easy on himself. These shortcomings are especially hard to miss in the essay on television and fiction, which was published in 1992. In much of the piece, he offers a sharp and persuasive attack on the literary culture of institutionalized irony. For writers like Pynchon and Gaddis, irony was a corrosive weapon against "the System," the status quo; but now irony's edge has been blunted by years of sitcom repetition, and so satirists of television such as Mark Leyner who "attempt to 'respond' to television via ironic genuflection" are "all too easily subsumed into the tired televisual ritual of mock-worship." The result, Wallace warns, is a writing that is "dead on the page," "some kind of line's end's end." Worst of all, the methods of this literature are "oppressive," because they prohibit the reader from asking the innocent question, "but what do you mean?" Wallace's conclusion about Leyner and associates is entirely on the mark: their work is "hilarious, upsetting, sophisticated, and extremely shallow."

This is a perfectly just assessment of much recent American writing, the smug, knowing style that strives to imitate the disingenuous self-mockery of a clever TV ad. But what is Wallace's corrective for this state of affairs? From which standpoint does he propose to offer serious resistance? The answer, we learn, is a new brand of literature that will "treat of plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction." Literature must not be afraid of its traditional mission, which is to provide "insights and guides to value." Indeed, virtually anything that promises to overcome the aesthetic of "trendy sardonic exhaustion" will do.

The problem is that Wallace's advocacy of earnestness turns out to be rather halfhearted. A reader quickly discovers that he can't use the words "reverence" and "conviction" without adding that he knows they are "untrendy"; he can't speak from the heart without adding a passing comment about how he knows he's not supposed to do that. The urge to escape irony and the urge to use it are all mixed up in his prose. As ever, Wallace's writing is full of side gestures and feints. But they are a greater liability in a work of criticism than in a work of fiction. Though his self-undermining asides are often quite funny, taken together they seem like a nervous act of self-defense. When he concludes by calling for a new breed of "anti-rebels" who will be "willing ... to risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Of overcredulity. Of softness," it is impossible to credit his profession that this is a role he would want for himself.

In the lengthy profile-essay on David Lynch, which was written on the set of *Lost Highway*, Wallace returns to many of the quandaries that inspire his own work, but from a different angle. Wallace admires Lynch, who charts a path between the "antiempathetic solipsism" of the avant-garde and the trite sentimentality of Hollywood. Lynch's films, in Wallace's estimation, are free of the self-protections of irony; instead, they are the work of an unaffected "genius" or "idiot" who seeks "psychic intimacy," who wants only to "get inside your head." *Blue Velvet* wasn't an exercise in satire or surrealism; it was an experimental film in which every detail—somehow, miraculously enough—"*felt true.*"

As Wallace describes them, Lynch's methods come to sound an awful lot like Wallace's own. His films have rejected "conventional linear narrative" while "devot[ing] quite a lot of energy to character. I.e. they've had human beings in them." And they've also avoided the temptation to moralize, insisting that the capacity for evil may lie closer to home than we think. Lynch's films pass no moral judgments, but they are not a moral holiday: they require "empathetic confrontation with the exact same muddy *both*ness in ourselves and our intimates that makes the real world of moral selves so tense and uncomfortable." This is precisely the kind of complexity that Wallace wants to introduce into his own characters.

But do Lynch's films really succeed in exploring the "psychic spaces in which people are capable of evil"? A viewer of *Lost Highway*, certainly, will not think so. The film's concluding revelations about a character's sordid past hardly come across as a revelation of interior motives or feelings; they look, instead, like a ritualistic bow to a vaguely imagined "underworld" that is all too easily assumed to hold the sunlit world in its sway. In studying Lynch's influence, Wallace never contemplates the possibility that a belief in the omnipresence of evil can itself become a cliché, and no less reflexive than the tidy sorting of individuals into

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heroes and villains. If evil can show up everywhere, then all judgments are hypocritical. And if all judgments are hypocritical, then one might as well adopt a pose of blank, knowing indifference—the very stance of "trendy, sardonic exhaustion" that Wallace claims elsewhere to loathe.

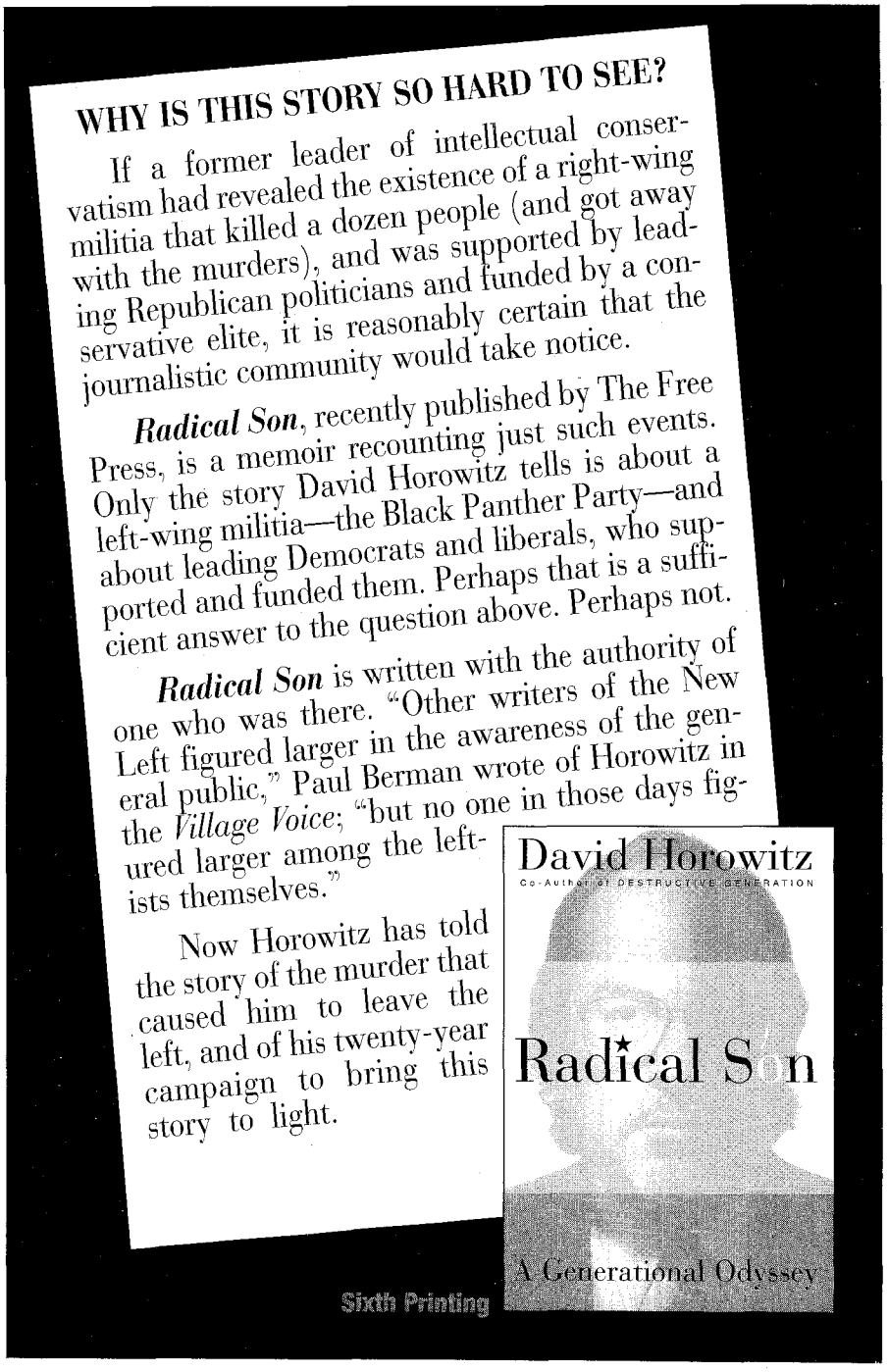
While the admiration that Wallace expresses for Lynch's "artistic heroism" is genuine, his terms of admiration are not very persuasive. Wallace congratulates Lynch for avoiding the temptations of irony, but it is Lynch's gift for frustrating the audience's expectations that he wishes to emulate. He praises Lynch for refusing to judge his characters, but it is the capacity to make genuine and "unembarrassed" judgments that he believes contemporary artists must resurrect. He admires Lynch for his depth of characterization, but he has also mocked the very idea of providing characters with inner lives: "in our post-1950s inseparable-from-TV-association pool, brand loyalty is really synechdochic of character; this is simply a fact." Wallace delivers his critical judgments with great confidence, but they don't add up to a set of coherent propositions, much less a meaningful aesthetic.

Wallace's most artful essay, by contrast, is the title essay of his book, a novella-length account of a weeklong Caribbean cruise ship vacation. It begins tranquilly, rises to a considerable pitch of wicked laughter and mock horror, and then ends on a surprisingly gentle note. The furniture of the ship, its luxurious accommodations and its unsettling promise of "managed fun" are described with fanatical precision. Toward the end of the journey, the passengers gather for their most bizarre night of entertainment, a session with an English hypnotist, whose "boredom and hostility are not only undisguised, they are incorporated kind of ingeniously into the entertainment itself." The hypnotist robs selected audience members of their minds, creating "fantasies so vivid that the subjects do not even know they are fantasies." Watching grown adults act as if they were utterly lost, Wallace notes that it's "as if their heads were no longer their own."

This kind of willing self-surrender is Wallace's worst fear. It is the threat that drug addiction's slavery, and *Infinite Jest*'s "recursive loops," and the dreadful paranoia of the appearance-obsessed, all pose to the individual who would be "the rational and articulate protagonist of his own drama." But Wallace doesn't put the hypnosis scene to its expected use. It doesn't become one more allegory of Americans' loss of self-control or their slavery to artificial fantasies. Instead, he comes to see the experience of hypnosis as something neither "entertaining" nor "depressing" but merely, in his own fondly chosen word, "weird." The oddness of the occasion does not stimulate him to draw any lessons from it. Instead it frees him to do some fantasizing of his own.

And so, trying to avoid the mesmerist's influence, Wallace falls into his own "trance," where he comes to see the ship from the outside, through a drowning man's eyes. When he snaps out of it, he is back on shore. And now he believes that, having survived his adventure, he may be able to cope with "adult demands." It was "good to be on" and now it is "good to get off." The movement away from sentience is where *Infinite Jest* ends. But the essay reverses the novel's drift: it flirts with a reinvigorated sense of purpose and composure. Wallace is trying to live up to the straightforward, if not particularly demanding, ideal that he offered earlier in the essay: "Day to day I have to make all sorts of choices about what is good and important and fun, and then I have to live with the forfeiture of all the other options those choices foreclose."

What could these stumbling, ostentatiously sincere words mean? It is a little hard to accept Wallace's sudden humbleness. And his declarations of impend-


WHY IS THIS STORY SO HARD TO SEE?
If a former leader of intellectual conservatism had revealed the existence of a right-wing militia that killed a dozen people (and got away with the murders), and was supported by leading Republican politicians and funded by a conservative elite, it is reasonably certain that the journalistic community would take notice.
Radical Son, recently published by The Free Press, is a memoir recounting just such events. Only the story David Horowitz tells is about a left-wing militia—the Black Panther Party—and about leading Democrats and liberals, who supported and funded them. Perhaps that is a sufficient answer to the question above. Perhaps not.
Radical Son is written with the authority of one who was there. "Other writers of the New Left figured larger in the awareness of the general public," Paul Berman wrote of Horowitz in the Village Voice; "but no one in those days figured larger among the leftists themselves."
Now Horowitz has told the story of the murder that caused him to leave the left, and of his twenty-year campaign to bring this story to light.
David Horowitz
Co-Author of DESTRUCTIVE GENERATION
Radical Son
A Generational Odyssey
Sixth Printing

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ing adulthood do not ring very true. "Good and demanding and fun": this is the very language of the awkward teenager that he aspires to leave behind. "Fun" is an ideal of quick, even instant gratification; it lowers the level of Wallace's ambition and takes back the seriousness that he just expressed. What if it turns out that the good and the demanding are not "fun"? It usually turns out that way. Still, Wallace's talk of "forfeitures" and foreclosures is encouraging. For once, his compulsion to make his own thoughts, though still present, is held in check. It's as if he's searching for a set of words that are simply too serious to play with, words that have the weight of deeds.

For all the brilliant expansiveness of his writing, Wallace's great subject is the anxiety of introspection. In his hands, self-awareness is a scary thing. What his fictional characters express with their vast piles of words is, essentially, terror; and with the same vast piles of words they try to hold off (and laugh at) that terror. The only options that are forbidden to them are self-confidence and self-forgetfulness. And so Wallace's universe is finally not as sprawling as his novel. His fiction would benefit greatly from the acknowledgment that strength and work and the transcendence of the self are also parts of the human comedy. With such a thought in mind, this remarkable writer might be able to create sober, autonomous human beings with as much intimacy, and as little caricature, as he brings to his descriptions of frightened teenagers and damaged adults.

ALEXANDER STAR is the editor of *Lingua Franca: The Review of Academic Life.*

Pluribus

BY ALAN TAYLOR

American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence by Pauline Maier

(Alfred A. Knopf, 304 pp., $27.50)

Our civic religion teaches Americans to revere icons largely detached from their historical content and imbued with a symbolic power far beyond their original significance. In Philadelphia, people throng to see the Liberty Bell as if it played a critical role in the struggle for independence. And in Plymouth, Massachusetts, they admire a nondescript rock enclosed in a pavilion, because a nineteenth-century antiquarian arbitrarily declared that Pilgrims had stepped on it in 1620. And so it is with the piece of parchment called the Declaration of Independence that is displayed in the rotunda of the National Archives, in a triptych with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. How many of the hordes who visit the shrine have read the entire document?

At best they know part of one celebrated sentence in the second paragraph: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed...." Mischievous pollsters and sociologists periodically have fun at the public's expense by quizzing citizens to identify a part of that paragraph's conclusion: "when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce [the people] under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government." Unable to recognize or endorse the passage, many Americans answer that the words derive from *The Communist Manifesto.*

In her new book, Pauline Maier argues that our nation's revolutionary documents have been subdued by reverence and spectacle. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights "are encased in massive, bronze-framed, bulletproof glass containers filled with inert helium gas." They are labeled "Charters of Freedom," but they have been imprisoned, flanked by day by military guards dressed in black and lowered at night "into a vault of reinforced concrete and steel that... is twenty-two feet deep, weighs fifty-five tons, and was built... in 1952, when the Cold War was beginning to make bomb shelters something of a fashion."

An astute and accomplished historian, Maier finds the scene disturbing. For a scholar so committed to precision and so respectful of the contingency of events, what torture could be greater than to wait in line overhearing tourists' awed misunderstandings of history as they stare raptly at the glass and the surrounding mural? "To me the vital documents themselves seemed pretty dead. In fact, the spectacle had the air of a state funeral." Worse still, Maier concludes, "the original, signed texts of the Declaration of Independence and, to a lesser extent, the Constitution have become for the United States what Lenin's body was for the Soviet Union, a tangible remnant of the revolution to which its children can still cling."

With a special tenacity and a thoroughly American optimism, Maier set out to liberate and to enliven the document by writing an accessible history of its origins and its later transformation. In this carefully researched and thoughtfully written book, she persuasively argues that the Declaration began in 1776 as a revolutionary manifesto, but was reconceived in the mid-nineteenth century as a sanctified foundation document for our empire of liberty. By recovering both the making and the remaking, she means for next years' tourists to understand the complex history behind the glass.

Maier balks at the romantic tradition that highlights an individual genius in both the original drafting (Thomas Jefferson) and the subsequent reinvention (Abraham Lincoln). She deems Jefferson "the most overrated person in American history... because of the extraordinary adulation (and, sometimes, execration) he has received and continues to receive." Misled by his exaggerated claims to almost exclusive authorship, many American pundits confuse Jefferson with "an incarnation of the American nation." Viewers who recently endured Ken Burns's ponderous and hagiographic film on public television will know what she means. Maier has a higher regard for Lincoln, but she does not think much of Garry Wills's argument that Lincoln alone transformed the Declaration of Independence into our sacred text by the great, single act of writing the Gettysburg Address. Maier is a social historian of politics, and she exercises her skills to de-emphasize the lone great hero and to reassert the collective influence of the "words and thoughts of many people."

To whittle down Jefferson's role to mortal dimensions, Maier reconstructs

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the complex social and political context of 1775-76, when a civil war erupted within the thirteen mainland North American colonies of the British Empire. The war mobilized the political energies of thousands of common farmers and mechanics and women, as well as the more famous "Founding Fathers," who, as delegates to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, governed the rebelling colonies. The congressmen faced an almost impossible task: to concoct from scratch a government with an army and a navy capable of defending the long seaboard and an equally extended frontier against the world's most powerful empire, which retained the support of about a fifth of the colonists.

War erupted in April, 1775, but for the rest of that year most congressmen and their constituents clung to a hope that the British would back down by withdrawing their troops, their taxes and their commercial restrictions. If so, the colonists could remain within the empire as a commercial framework while enjoying domestic autonomy. But the King and the Parliament in London refused to relent. During the summer and fall of 1775, they rejected the Congress's petition for redress; declared the colonists rebels; dispatched to America thousands of additional troops, including provocative "Hessian" mercenaries from Germany; blockaded trans-Atlantic commerce; impressed colonial sailors into the Royal Navy; burned three substantial coastal towns; encouraged Virginia's slaves to run away; and recruited the frontier's Indians to attack backcountry settlements.

The British war measures outraged most Americans, undercutting the moderate congressmen and emboldening the more radical ones to promote independence as the new year began. To increase the popular pressure on the moderates, in the spring of 1776 the radicals encouraged colonies and localities to adopt resolutions endorsing independence. One of Maier's greatest accomplishments is the recovery of some ninety examples of these "other Declarations of Independence" from May and June of 1776. "Most have been forgotten under the influence of our national obsession" with a single, national, and sacred Declaration of Independence. The local declarations include the resolves of New York mechanics, Pennsylvania militiamen, Massachusetts town meetings, Virginia county conventions and South Carolina grand juries.

In general, these proclamations expressed the American cause in concise, clear and forceful language. A meeting of New York City's mechanics demanded to know how Americans could remain subject to a monarch "who is deaf to our petitions for interposing his Royal authority in our behalf, and for redressing our grievances, but ... seems to take pleasure in our destruction." The Boston town meeting asserted that "for the prayer of peace" the King had "tendered the sword; for liberty, chains; and for safety, death." Most of these local declarations anticipated the famous Declaration by combining a philosophical preface with a central bill of indictment against King George, concluding with a formal commitment to independence.

By recovering the influence of the earlier local declarations, Maier effects two major shifts in our perspective on the national Declaration. First, she ends its splendid isolation, placing the Declaration in a thick social context, as the culmination of a great popular political movement involving thousands of common Americans, as well as the Founding Fathers. Second, she reasserts the central importance, in the local and the congressional declarations, of the charges against the King. Although those charges dominate the Declaration of July 4, 1776, they have been slighted in twentieth-century scholarship by a preoccupation with the document's eloquent and philosophical preface. Recent historians of the congressional Declaration have plumbed for the contents of Jefferson's mind, emphasizing his reading in British political philosophers. Then these scholars have split hairs over whether John Locke or Francis Hutcheson had the greater influence on Jefferson.

Maier demonstrates the much more immediate influence of the grass-roots declarations of May and June, 1776, upon Jefferson's draft. In particular, he admired and appropriated much of his rhetoric and reasoning from George Mason's "Declaration of Rights," recently drafted to serve as part of Virginia's declaration of state independence and recently published in a Philadelphia newspaper. Mason wrote "that all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural rights, of which they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety." In the celebrated second paragraph of the Declaration, Jefferson would express the same cluster of ideas more concisely. And because the local declarations in-

A Roman

Lately Gaius Clodius
Has grown weary of his dreams.
It isn't the tedium of adulteries
Or the malice of murder that disturbs him;
It's the pettiness and multitude of his desires,
How they insert themselves into every nook
Of his nocturnal mind forcing him in ardent,
Unflinching detail to betray secrets, steal coins,
Fib for no reason, drink beyond satiation.

A victim of his itinerant sensations, he can see
The Christians differently, their pallor and
Their fierceness and he hates that unwanted wisdom.
A body of iron with handsome wounds
From many campaigns and a mind as
Soft as a sheep's guts. How?

He rises in the morning haggard and unfit.
He walks through the city that
Made him a man, saluting his equals,
Knowing that they see the signs of his distress.
When he finds himself by the river,
He thinks of those sad notions the Christians
Have, of their all-seeing god and their
Faith in the strength of unsanctioned rites.

The sun glances playfully off the calm river.
He lowers his head as in an obeisance,
As if to heal what he cannot protect.

Baron Wormser

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formed Jefferson's thinking and primed the colonists' expectations, they universally regarded the enumerated charges against the King as the very essence of the July 4 document. In 1776, both patriots and loyalists said little about the preface, recognizing it (as we no longer can) as boilerplate.

In the late spring of 1776, the colonial and local declarations strengthened the hand of the radicals who pressed Congress to act. Led by John Adams of Massachusetts, Congress took a giant step toward independence on May 15 by authorizing and encouraging the colonies individually to draft and to adopt republican constitutions, thus effectively rejecting the authority of the British empire. In a second great leap forward, on June 7, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia introduced a resolution that Congress declare independence, seek foreign allies and form a permanent confederacy of the new states. Congress put off a decision until the end of the month, but in the interim it appointed a five-man committee headed by Adams to draft a declaration of independence.

Four of the committee members, including Adams, possessed such daunting executive responsibilities for conducting the critical war effort that they had no time to write a declaration. Deeming the task relatively insignificant, they assigned the drafting to their most junior and most silent colleague, the shy and defensive Thomas Jefferson. He had the further recommendation of being their best political writer, and he hailed from Virginia, the most important colony. Historians have generally followed Jefferson's self-serving, late-life reminiscences in reconstructing the poorly documented process of drafting the Declaration. He claimed to have created the document virtually alone, with only token contributions from the rest of his committee. He also insisted that when Congress got a hold of his draft on July 3-4, they "mangled" it, lopping off the best quarter of his words. Maier challenges Jefferson's claims, by recovering the important contributions of the other committee members, especially the astute Benjamin Franklin, and by demonstrating the constructive editing role performed by Congress as a whole.

Jefferson was not the lone, creative artist that he later claimed to be—and that his enthusiasts continue to insist that he was. As was the common practice of eighteenth-century writers, especially those pressed for time, he freely appropriated ideas and words from other texts, including his own pamphlet of 1774, *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, and especially George Mason's recent "Declaration of Rights" for Virginia. Eighteenth-century intellectuals cherished clever revision over the spontaneous invention subsequently celebrated by nineteenth-century romanticism's cult of the original genius.

Jefferson's draft was of mixed quality: an eloquent preface and a spirited concluding sentence braced a long, turgid and vague litany of supposed grievances against the King. Maier observes that much of Jefferson's draft "left observers, then and now, scrambling to figure out what it was talking about." Especially implausible was Jefferson's diatribe entirely blaming the slave trade on the British king. This was a rather odd argument for a Virginia slaveholder to press, but it is Jefferson's longest and most impassioned one, and it culminates his twenty-one-count indictment. Maier notes that he "meant it to be the emotional climax of his case against the King." Instead it embarrassed his colleagues, most of whom either owned slaves or came from colonies that profited from their commerce; the congressmen had the good sense to drop Jefferson's final charge, rather than call attention to their own contradictions in preaching liberty while practicing slaveholding. In sum, Maier finds Jefferson's draft inferior to its shorter and more direct local prototypes. "From a comparative perspective, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the states and localities had offered a more effective case for Independence."

On June 28, the committee reported Jefferson's draft to Congress, which on July 1 took up the business of declaring independence. Maier carefully distinguishes Congress's votes to declare independence on July 1 and 2 from its authorization on July 4 of the document known as the Declaration of Independence. She also restores the chaotic drama of life in Congress in 1776, crafting a persuasive picture at odds with the legendary depictions of magisterial dignity, solemnity and patience. During the first week of July, Congress was in ominous suspense over a deteriorating military situation. Their disease-ridden northern army had been routed in Canada, and British armadas had recently appeared off Charleston and New York City. Given the power that was being mustered against the Americans' ramshackle defenses, it was a most inauspicious moment to declare independence.

The congressmen were desperate gamblers. If Britain ultimately prevailed, their declaration would mark them as traitors deserving execution. Meanwhile, the immense difficulties and the innumerable details of military and political administration demanded most of their time, exhausting Congressmen with interminable hours of committee work. They were hard-pressed to find the time to declare independence. On July 3, Congress could not take up the draft declaration until they had first established the wage scale and benefits for military shipwrights.

Having cast the crucial votes for independence, Congress had no time to send the promising but flawed draft of the declaration back to the committee for revision. Instead, as a committee of the whole, Congress had to edit the text in open meeting during parts of just two days, July 3 and 4. Given the usual camels produced by committees meant to design horses, the result was miraculous: as Maier rightly calls it, "an act of group editing that has to be one of the great marvels of history." Collectively, the congressmen rescued the potential in Jefferson's draft by tightening his language and by reducing or eliminating his most forced and rambling accusations—especially his attack on the King for allegedly protecting the slave trade.

They discarded fully a quarter of Jefferson's words, while clarifying the rest with judicious insertions. The changes infuriated the hypersensitive Jefferson, who, for the rest of his life, insisted upon the utter superiority of his original draft. Maier corrects Jefferson by displaying, in an appendix, his draft with Congress's modifications. Their every change improved the whole, to the immense benefit of the ungrateful draftsman's enduring reputation. Maier explains, "What generations of Americans came to revere was not Jefferson's but Congress's Declaration, the work not of a single man, or even a committee, but of a larger body of men with the good sense to recognize a 'pretty good' draft when they saw it, and who were able to identify and eliminate Jefferson's more outlandish assertions and unnecessary words." Yet Jefferson has subsequently reaped all of the credit.

Congress designed the Declaration primarily for domestic consumption, as propaganda to stiffen the flagging morale of exhausted soldiers and anxious citizens. The vote and the Declaration clarified what Americans were fighting for: a crusade to protect liberty by securing nationhood from a grasping, foreign tyrant. After a flurry of public readings and newspaper publications in the summer of 1776, the Declaration quickly dropped from sight, little recalled in subsequent celebrations of the Fourth of July. "Independence was new," Maier

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explains, "the rest of the Declaration seemed all too familiar, a restatement of what had already been said time and again."

During the 1790s, the Declaration reemerged from obscurity as Jefferson became the national leader of the Republican Party (not to be confused with today's very different Republican Party). More democratic, the Jeffersonian Republicans challenged their more elitist rivals, the Federalists, who dominated both the federal government and most local celebrations of the Fourth of July. The Republicans staged their own celebrations, which culminated in reverential public readings of the Declaration. These partisan celebrations began the process of sacralizing the document and treating Jefferson as its exclusive author—and, therefore, as the very incarnation of American republicanism. In vain, the Federalists struggled to discredit Jefferson's role in writing the Declaration. As Federalism collapsed in electoral politics, beginning with Jefferson's election to the presidency in 1801, the Jeffersonian mode of celebrating the Fourth gradually became ubiquitous. By 1819, even Timothy Pickering, once the most notorious arch-Federalist in the land, took to reading the Declaration aloud to crowds on the Fourth of July. Maier remarks, "By then, too, for better or worse, the modern emphasis on individual creativity and novelty, so unlike the eighteenth century's respect for imitation and adaptation, had made its appearance."

During the 1820s a new generation of Americans began to heroicize the dead and dying leaders of the revolution, and to treat the Declaration and its republic as divinely inspired works of universal truth. "In the course of recalling and recording the events of the Revolution, Americans of the 1820s remembered the revolutionaries as mighty fathers whose greatness threw into relief the ordinariness of their descendants." As two of the longest lived revolutionaries, Jefferson and Adams were best positioned to claim most of the credit for Congress's 1776 vote for, and declaration of, independence. Few of their peers were alive to contest their claims.

In a revived correspondence, friendly and spirited, the former rivals bolstered their joint claims to greatness, above all the other Founders. At the same time, of course, each jockeyed for advantage over the other. Adams insisted upon the superior significance of the congressional vote of July 2, a vote that he had primarily engineered. In response, Jefferson reiterated the transcendent importance of the written Declaration of July 4.

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TRANSITION

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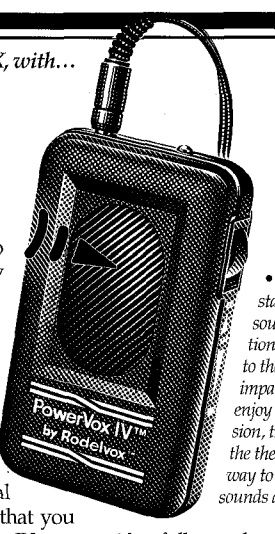

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Since Jefferson was by far the more popular of the two former presidents, the public continued to endorse his claim and to adore the Declaration. The adulation was a mixed blessing. Uninvited visitors flocked to Monticello, taxing Jefferson's time, larder and patience. One woman "even smashed a window with her parasol to improve her view of the old man." Both Jefferson and Adams had the exquisite timing to die on July 4, 1826—the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration. Public commentators took that apparently providential conjunction as "proof that the United States had a special place in His plans and affections."

As a new generation of Americans exalted Jefferson and his Declaration, they began to focus on its preface, especially the egalitarian second paragraph. This refocusing occurred as Americans became polarized over the Southern persistence of slavery and its westward expansion into new territories. Slavery's foes highlighted Jefferson's insistence "that all men are created equal." Recognizing the public power of reverence for the Declaration, slavery's apologists scrambled to deny that Jefferson's words applied to blacks. As early as 1789, a South Carolina politician had warned against a federal Bill of Rights because, like the Declaration of Independence, such documents "generally began with a statement that all men are born free and equal, which was not the case in South Carolina."

The Southern defenders of inequality were historically correct. Jefferson's egalitarian rhetoric properly described the theoretical and pre-political state of nature. According to eighteenth-century Anglo-American political philosophy, men accepted gradations of inequality when they established society—which was essential, in theory, to securing property and civilized order. But that philosophical distinction between the state of nature and the state of society eluded growing numbers of men and women in the nineteenth century. During the 1850s and 1860s, antislavery politicians such as Benjamin Franklin Wade and Abraham Lincoln took Jefferson's words out of context to exalt them as a universal truth that Americans consistently must seek if their republic was to survive. Maier notes that the antislavery "version of what the founders meant was full of wishful supposition." But their bad history made for an inspiring creed that won the Civil War and subsequently empowered the civil rights movement. Lincoln's understanding of the Declaration "became in time that of the nation."

Maier is uncomfortably aware of the paradox that Lincoln helped create a liberalizing creed by distorting the national memory of Jefferson's intent. A scrupulous scholar, she cannot endorse Lincoln's historical sleight of hand. A committed liberal, she cannot wish that he had been a more precise historian. This standoff makes for an awkward ending to an otherwise profound and eloquent book. In the epilogue, she insists that knowing the full, clumsy truth about our national origins will revitalize our currently apathetic civic culture. Although I hope that she is right, I fear that Maier exaggerates the redemptive power of a complicated historical understanding.

Indeed, her demonstration of how Lincoln and others reinvented a mythic Declaration suggests that our republic cannot do without a set of noble fictions. Historians find it reassuring that our nation's public life apparently requires some sense of connection with a powerful past, with the founding and refounding acts of Adams, Jefferson and Lincoln. Alas, of necessity, the public and its pundits invariably rework that past into a convenient shorthand that mixes half-truths with reassuring fictions. Despite Maier's powerful book, reverential visitors will continue to flock to see the enshrined parchment, thinking of it in Lincoln's terms and giving Jefferson all the credit.

ALAN TAYLOR teaches history at the University of California at Davis. He is the author of *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (Knopf).

Boxed Spirit

BY MARK POLIZZOTTI

Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell by Deborah Solomon

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 426 pp., $30)

Pity the hapless biographers. In most cases they have to contend with the reality that the lives of their subjects are more complex than can be sorted and summarized between two covers, that their developments and contradictions seem to elude a guiding theme or a final word. The life of the artist Joseph Cornell, on the other hand, almost begs to be reduced to a single, central drama: his voluntary indenture to his demanding, dissatisfied mother and disabled younger brother, which kept him a virtual prisoner in his own home and made him into one of the great social misfits of our time. The fact that Cornell managed to overcome (or to use) these personal constraints and emerge as one of the true "artist's artists" of the twentieth century is a testament to the streak of rebellious perversity that he never entirely lost. And the fact that Deborah Solomon has produced so engaging a life of a man who virtually didn't have one is a testament to a rare gift for empathy or her own skillful perversity, or both.

While Cornell's name is familiar to most connoisseurs of modern art, his life and his personality remain as hermetic as the cryptic shadow boxes on which much of his reputation rests. These boxes, which he began producing in the 1930s and continued to make almost until his death, were three-dimensional constructions framed in pine, usually no more than a square foot, containing anything from real vegetation to dishware to pop culture artifacts (such as children's toys and penny-arcade trinkets) to photostatted images of birds, movie actresses or fine art reproductions. Cornell also produced numerous collages, short films and a lengthy diary (a large portion of which was published in 1993), but it is the boxes that have fixed his position in art history. And, as this first full-length biography of the man makes painfully clear, these boxes encapsulated practically all the crippled affect that Cornell could bring himself to reveal.

Almost from the start, Cornell's life was placed under the double sign of crushing responsibility and an infinite capacity for childlike wonderment: the first, making him an old man well before his years, the second, ensuring that he never really grew up. He was born in South Nyack, New York, in 1903, on Christmas Eve, perhaps the most wondrous night in an American child's calendar, and he never forgot the marvelous conjunction of those two special

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days. "In his adulthood, Cornell would look back on the Christmases of his youth as a magical time," Solomon writes, adding that he often scheduled exhibits of his work in the privileged month of December. The works themselves, with their childlike aspect, participated in this sense of retrospective enchantment—so much so that Julien Levy, Cornell's first dealer, advertised his artist's Yuletide offerings as "toys for adults," and (with scant success) encouraged visitors to buy them as holiday gifts.

But this childhood magic had a darker face to it. According to one of his sisters, Cornell was also "a hypersensitive and moody boy who tended to stay around the house"—a description that could just as well be applied to the adult—and who bartered a series of nervous ailments against as much of his mother's care as he could finagle. Helen Cornell abetted and encouraged her son's overdependence "not only with the attention she lavished on him but with the approval she just as capriciously withheld. While she claimed he had 'top place' in her life, she left him feeling more diminished than fortified, and led him to believe that nothing he accomplished was enough to repay her devotion." In this regard, as Solomon points out, Cornell's "delight at the never-failing souvenirs" that his mother would bring back from trips to New York and give her son "in bed in the dark"—trinkets from penny machines, much like the ones that would later resurface in his boxes—takes on an unmistakably sensual and fetishistic cast. Reviewing the hundreds of letters that Helen wrote to her son throughout his life, and that Cornell faithfully preserved until the end, Solomon sketches the portrait of "a vivacious but needy woman who yearned for Joseph with an ardor more befitting a lover than a mother."

This minuet of attraction and rejection and the ironclad bond it forged were given further impetus by two events in Cornell's childhood: the birth in 1910 of his brother Robert, who suffered from severe cerebral palsy, and, a few years later, the death of his father from pernicious anemia (he had the same name as his son, which casts an equivocal light on Helen's lifelong self-designation as "Mrs. Joseph Cornell"). At the age of 13, Cornell had become both the "man of the house" and, to a far greater extent than anyone else in the family, Robert's devoted guardian.

If ever Helen needed a chain with which to bind her first-born to her, Robert was made to order. As his sister noted, "she expected him to do everything for Robert," on pain of suffering the motherly disapproval that had already become unbearable to him. Solomon astutely summarizes the situation:

> Already, it seems, the basic triangle of relations in Cornell's life was firmly in place. He believed it was his mission to care for Robert, a vision conceived out of loyalty to his brother but also to his implacable mother. The sacrifices that Joseph made on Robert's behalf were certainly valiant, yet the self he inhabited was so diminished he could not afford to think of his deeds in such generous terms. The truth is that his mother made him feel that his own needs were unimportant beside Robert's—that he should be ashamed for having needs in the first place.

Visitors to the Cornell home would frequently comment that the wheelchair-bound Robert was far more cheerful and outgoing than his silent, depressive older sibling. Solomon remarks that "in some ways Joseph was the more hampered and hobbled brother."

It is little wonder that Cornell's adolescence, which was almost entirely subsumed by an obsessive concern for his family's welfare (even during the undistinguished four years he spent as a prep school boarder in Andover, Massachusetts, his only extended absence from the family), coincided with a fascination with Harry Houdini. Cornell had always been interested in magic, and he fondly remembered the tricks that his father had ably performed in earlier years; but it was especially Houdini's prowess as an escape artist that captured the adolescent's fancy. Solomon explains this as a desire to see Robert escape the confines of his wheelchair and "to shed his own skin, to shake off his sense of limitation as a marginal student just barely scraping through school." But it seems equally likely that the seductive fantasy had as much to do with escape from the rigid obligations of home life, even as his removal from them caused him massive anxiety.

In any case, immediately after leaving Andover in the early 1920s, Cornell went to live in Bayside, Queens, with his mother, brother and two sisters (who soon married their way out of the family clutches). Although his studies had been fairly classical—Latin, English, the sciences and French, the only subject in which he did well—he took a job as a salesman for a textile wholesaler in New York City, following (almost literally) in the footsteps of his fabric salesman father. The work was miserable; Solomon describes the reclusive Cornell "lugging his heavy sample trunk

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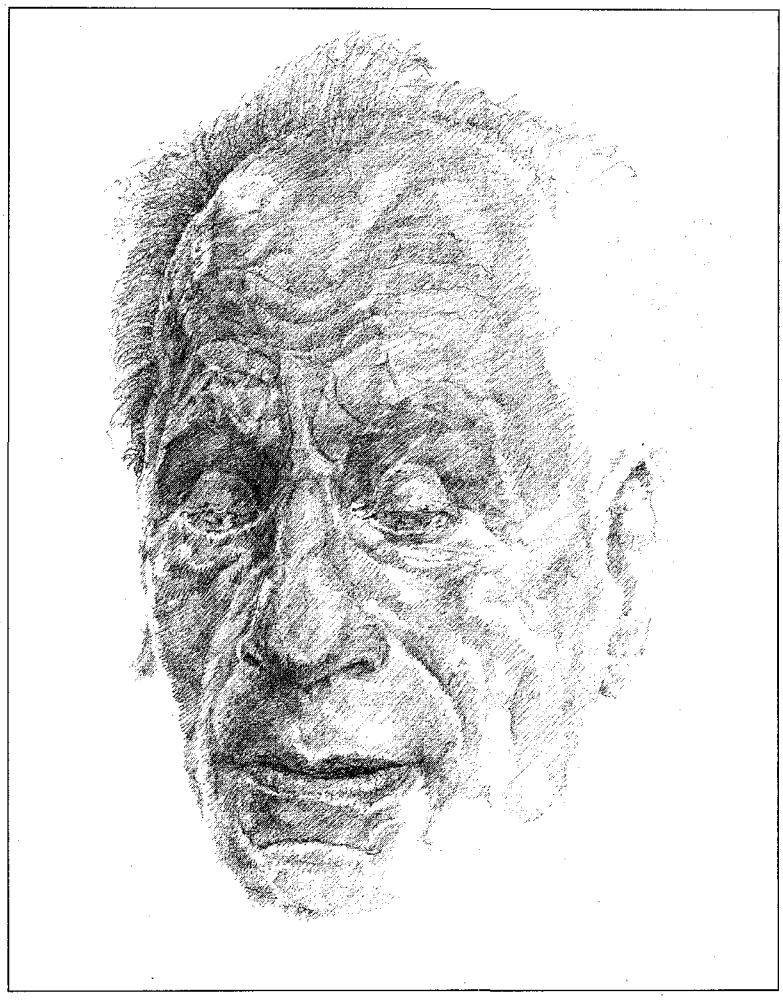
along the crowded sidewalks of Broadway" and dreading his meetings with clients. Despite this, he stayed at the firm for a decade, "never looking elsewhere or preparing for another career." Certainly, his income was needed to support the family, particularly since Helen never considered taking a job herself. But it is also as if the stultifying mortification of his position were a kind of penance (for his time away, perhaps?), one more sacrifice that he could offer his implacable mother.

Cornell nonetheless enjoyed a few pleasures in the city, guiltily hoarded during lunch breaks or in the moments between work's end and the evening train back to Bayside. These included the dusty used bookstalls of lower Manhattan, where he came across some of the images that would later figure in his art; the avant-garde productions visible at galleries such as Alfred Stieglitz's "291" and the Whitney Studio Club; silent movies, the inspiration for his later ventures into "ready-made" filmmaking; and the classical ballet, of which he was an avid fan. The ballet held a special thrill for Cornell, who developed infatuations with particular dancers (some of them long dead) and later featured them in a series of visual homages. For Cornell, who died a virgin, these unrequited loves were virtually his only sexual relations; the romantic ardor that he invested in them was every bit as intense as if they had been actual love affairs.



JOSEPH CORNELL BY DAVID SCHORR FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Cornell's exposure to art did not immediately translate into a desire to practice it himself, all the more so in that he had never shown any particular inclination toward (or talent for) traditional forms of artistic expression. It wasn't until 1931, at the age of 27, that he created his first work of art: a collage featuring an old engraving of a schooner, an enormous rose half-covered by a spider web hanging off its stern. *Schooner* and a few other early pieces were inspired by his recent discovery of Max Ernst's "collage-novel" *La Femme 100 têtes*, made entirely of nineteenth-century bookplates reconfigured into a wacky and disturbing parade of Surrealist images. (This derivation is one of the main reasons behind Cornell's association with Surrealism, though Cornell himself disapproved of the movement's "unhealthy" preoccupation with sexuality.)

For the fledgling artist, Ernst's book was doubly revelatory: it gave him a model for his particular sensibility, and it showed him that in art the scissors could be just as potent a tool as the brush. From there it was a relatively short step to making three-dimensional collages—pill boxes that he filled with shells, sequins and other ephemera, and a few years later his first shadow boxes proper. The idea for the shadow boxes was adapted in part from a popular ladies' "parlour pastime" of the late nineteenth century. Solomon draws a nice parallel between the Victorian women who limited themselves to this "pseudo-art" because they thought it "undesirable to parade their talent" and Cornell, who "found in the form of the shadow box a safe place to hide his ambition."

By this time, there had been several important changes in Cornell's life. For one thing, he had lost his job at the textile firm, which left him more leisure to explore his new artistic interests. (Later, in a rare act of defiance against his mother, he would abandon remunerative employment altogether to pursue his art more fully.) And he had found a dealer in the person of Julien Levy, one of Surrealism's earliest champions in the United States, who gave his work its first validation—though the combination of Levy's timid arrangement and the diminutive size of Cornell's objects all but guaranteed they would be ignored.

By this time, too, he was living with his mother and brother in what would be their permanent address from now on: an utterly nondescript house on Utopia Parkway in Flushing, Queens. As might be expected of any great stay-at-home, Cornell turned Utopia Parkway into more than just his residence. It was his studio, his cocoon, and his self-image rolled into one; the place to which a string of admirers and fellow artists would venture in later years, to be served a "meal" of cake and sweets by their host (who subsisted on little else) and, if so favored, to be shown his latest creations.

It was also, as many later noted with surprise, the place where they could witness Helen Cornell's perpetual hectoring, the disparagement of her son that came to be increasingly at variance with the small but respectful reputation that Cornell was beginning to gain in the art world. Faced with the threat of Joseph developing a life away from home, Helen no doubt recognized that her disapproval, the one weapon that had never failed to keep him bound to her, was her best hope against the visitors (especially the female ones) that he sometimes invited into their kitchen. Cornell, typically, poured any tendencies toward resentment or flight into his shadow boxes, some of which appear fairly bursting with longing beneath their patina of dreamy innocence.

Assembled late at night on Cornell's kitchen table at Utopia Parkway, and later in a basement studio that he fash-

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ioned for himself, these meticulously constructed boxes staged the ongoing tragedy of the artist's life like so many serial episodes. They are exciting for their innovative qualities—Cornell can rightly be credited with having anticipated such currents as Minimalism, for instance, or Pop Art, with its unabashed mix of "high" and "low" cultures. But the real power of the boxes comes from the artist's coded yet insistent display of inner needs that he otherwise devoted so much energy to keeping buried.

One of the strangest examples is the early piece called *Bébé Marie*, a coated wooden box containing a doe-eyed Victorian doll set behind a thicket of silver twigs. It is, as Solomon suggests, an unsettling work, too sentimental and too disturbing, and at the same time a neat encapsulation of Cornell's sexual ambivalence. In *Bébé Marie*, the artist has encased a rosy-cheeked, straw-hatted little girl, a fantasy of purity—as well as an actual family heirloom—in the perfect showcase, leaving her at once exposed to his loving gaze and protected behind her enchanted shrubbery. The image raises a number of possible interpretations, not all of them savory.

For if Cornell, who looked on women as "sisters" (a word he frequently applied to female friends), prized the unblemished chastity symbolized by Bébé Marie, it is clear that she also offered him an erotic charge, something innocent and unthreatening and all the more alluring for that. "Bébé Marie was his ideal of a woman," a friend later remarked—so much so that Cornell once removed the doll from her housing and had her professionally photographed, "the way some other man might want a picture of his girlfriend." An ideal of purity, and also of perfect captivity: for Bébé Marie in her narrow box could well represent not only the artist in the confines of Utopia Parkway, but also the woman who would not, could not, elude him. Perhaps this is one reason why many of Cornell's boxes seem so impervious to interpretation. They are enticing on the surface, but a closer look begins to reveal things that the viewer might prefer not to see.

Cornell is hardly the first to have expressed his private conflicts through a creative medium—Solomon's claim that he was "singular" in reconciling his "spiritual aspirations and sensual compulsions through the experience of art" is a bit grandiose—but he exercised his art, like several great naïfs before him, with a rare indifference to public response. For Cornell, these creations were the words that his all-pervasive guilt and self-censorship would not allow him otherwise to speak, and he was just as liable to give one of them away to a privileged "interlocutor" (or to take it back when the dialogue ended) as he was to block a sale to an eager collector. The works were his "theater of the mind," to borrow Mary Ann Caws's phrase. His frustrated dealers notwithstanding, it is as if Cornell preferred there to be silence rather than have his boxes tell their secrets to unworthy ears.

Still, it is precisely the richness of the compensation, the contrast between the fantasy world constructed out of pine and trinkets and the flat impoverishment of his daily existence, that makes it difficult to build a true biography of the man. Faced with an endless, unvarying succession of filial and fraternal pieties intercut with moments of guilty minor pleasures, of insane passions for various women, many of whom didn't even know he was alive, and of diffident relations with other artists (such as Duchamp, whom Cornell so admired that on first meeting the legendary Frenchman he "nearly fainted with excitement"), Solomon ends up spending more of her time acting as a critic or a psychologist than as a biographer.

This in itself is not necessarily a bad thing: as a critic, she is generally illuminating (though some of her correlations between Cornell's life and work seem a little too neat), while as a psychologist she advances a number of intriguing hypotheses about Cornell's inner workings. And when she does get to write as a biographer, Solomon does a more than creditable job: it is no mean feat to fill 400 pages with an essentially plotless narrative and keep the reader interested. There are a few flaws—an occasional abstruse or clumsy phrasing, one or two mistaken facts or dates, a slight repetitiveness in her analyses of the art—but page for page they are noticeably fewer than in much of the prose published nowadays.

On the other hand, Solomon is rather too reticent in her discussions of Cornell's unorthodox emotional life. Though she makes a number of pertinent comments about the attachment between the man and his mother, she often seems to soft-pedal the voyeuristic nature of his relations with the shopgirls whose outfits he obsessively recorded in his diary, or with the pubescent actresses who populated his short films exclusively, or for that matter with the blind teenagers for whom he did charity work ("they could not see him seeing them"). Presenting Cornell as repressed and socially inept, Solomon explains his fantasy as one of "visual possession," allowing him to indulge his sexual curiosity without running the risk of "harmful consequences." But to an extent far greater than she seems willing to allow, these recordings emit something vaguely sinister, even downright creepy. They remind me of the sort of stuff that the cops might find in the room of a stalker.

The main problem, though, is that Solomon's book inadvertently raises a larger and thornier issue: Does every maker of notable work merit a full-scale biography on that basis alone? The fact that Solomon manages to wring as much water as she does out of such a stone merely begs the question. The truth is that, for all the mystery that might leak out of his hermetic constructions, Joseph Cornell simply didn't lead a very interesting life. A sad one, certainly; perhaps even an inspiring one, if we choose to read it as a parable of the creative impulse triumphing over deadening repression. As a case study, certainly, Cornell had enough psychic knots to keep an army of analysts busy for years. In this regard, Solomon gives full due to the "inward experiences" governing Cornell's creations: anyone who wonders what lay behind his homages to Greta Garbo or Lauren Bacall, or what can be read into the more disquieting compositions such as *Bébé Marie*, will find their answers here. But those expecting a life with even its normal share of dramas, passions and interactions will be disappointed. Reading this narrative is like turning endlessly around a center that simply doesn't exist.

This is not Solomon's fault, of course. As she warns us from the outset, Cornell "felt compelled to renounce virtually any pleasure," to will himself "into a life as monotonous as his brother's" (or his mother's). At the same time, this renunciation places the biographer in a somewhat uncomfortable position, for finally *Utopia Parkway* is the story of a life that never happened, or that took place within the confines of a one-foot-square frame. Perhaps there really are cases where the work is its own best

You Will Not Taste Death Jesus and Epicureanism

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explanation, where the person behind it should be allowed to fade into total transparency.

In this regard, Solomon's closing pages provide a fitting summation. Describing Cornell's funeral—he died in 1972, following by only a few years the mother and the brother to whom he had sacrificed his life—Solomon notes that the strikingly small number of mourners, mostly professional contacts, underscored the fact that the artist had resolutely maintained his distance from the things that for most people constitute the daily plenitude of existence. "Cornell had always been wary of the living, keeping his acquaintances at a safe remove," she writes. "His fantasy world was always more alive to him than the world in which he woke up every day." Alone in death as he was in life, he yet offered those present one final, definitive irony, which few of the mourners failed to notice: in size and appearance, the miniature coffin bearing the artist's ashes looked like nothing so much as a Cornell box.

MARK POLIZZOTTI is the author of *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (DaCapo).

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 5*

closed" either to the industry or to the press. At Hayes's February 5 press conference announcing the agreement, she said nothing of the concession. The paragraph Hayes quotes from *The Journal of Commerce*, which she cites in support of her claim that she informed the trade press about the secret concession to China, actually says nothing whatsoever about the concession. It is about something entirely different—how the safeguard agreement in the deal would work. Hayes was happy to talk about this aspect of the deal in her February 5 press conference because this aspect is in the interests of the U.S. textile industry. She was not at all interested in discussing the secret concession that works against U.S. interests. In fact, when, prior to publication of my story, I told Hayes's press representative that I wanted to talk to Hayes about the WTO provisions in the agreement, Hayes's representative said she would not discuss the terms with me.

After my article appeared, I talked to several textile industry officials who told me that Hayes was trying to strong-arm lobbyists into denouncing it. Evidently, she succeeded. Yet if you read the letter from Adams and Whelan very carefully, you'll see that they don't actually say they knew about Hayes's concession. Indeed, in my article I quoted Carlos Moore of the American Textile Manufacturers Institute and Carl Priestland of the American Apparel Manufacturers Association—the two men who directly represented Adams's and Whelan's organizations in the China negotiations—saying that they didn't know about Hayes's backroom deal. If Adams and Whelan knew all about the deal, how come their own negotiators did not?

Adams and Whelan say that the textile representatives in Beijing gave Hayes the option of giving away the ten-year phaseout in exchange for the safeguard agreement. I have obtained the actual memoranda that the industry representatives gave Hayes during the negotiations, which are signed by Moore and Priestland, among others. The memoranda stipulate that, if China joins the WTO, "the United States will administer a separate ten year product integration schedule *which will begin with China's date of admission*" (my italics). They say this condition "must apply" to China's membership. At no point in these memoranda did the industry give Hayes the option of a trade-off.

The real question is who gave Hayes the authority to make this secret deal, or whether she did it on her own. On the Saturday night after my article appeared, Hayes told one textile executive that State Department official Nicholas Riegg had authorized her to make the concession. But Riegg, who is the deputy director of the Office of Agriculture and Textile Trade Affairs at the State Department, told me that "Hayes made her decision. I didn't authorize anything."

Several sources also told me of an interagency meeting on textile negotiations that occurred before Hayes left for Beijing last fall—a meeting that veteran trade reporter Jim Ostroff refers to in the June 10 *Women's Wear Daily*. With Hayes present, the meeting reportedly reached agreement on a proposal by then-Undersecretary of Commerce Stuart Eizenstat (who recently became an undersecretary of state) that Hayes take the timing of the ten-year phaseout off the table during the talks. That account, if correct, suggests that Hayes was acting on her own when she granted the Chinese a concession on the WTO. If that's the case, a relatively minor government functionary was allowed to make major decisions about U.S.-China policy—decisions that affect, among others, a million and a half textile and apparel workers in the U.S. That would say something about Hayes's chutzpah, but also about the sorry state of the Clinton administration's China policy. Perhaps some senator possessed of an inquiring mind will ask Hayes about this when her nomination to be ambassador to the WTO comes before the Senate this year.

TRB *continued from page 6*

himself. He hadn't felt this way in years—not since those fourteen terrible months in the Hanoi Hilton.

Robert B. Reich's wrist chronometer, the gift of a grateful Queen, gave voice to its subtle alarm: "*pocketa-pocketa, ching! pocketa-pocketa, ching!*" "Well, rest in the ruins, honey," he said. "I've got to go face the dogs." Ten minutes later, showered, shaved and impeccably but simply dressed in his invariable uniform of gray flannel suit and crisp white shirt, Robert B. Reich stood before the White House press corps. He stood tall.

Robert B. Reich stared down at the slavering pack before him. It was after 11 a.m., so he knew that two-thirds of them were already drunk. Some of them were still clutching their snifters of expense-account brandy in their pudgy ink-stained hands. The air was a thick, ugly funk made up from the stench of the reporters' unwashed bodies and the illegal Cuban cigars they favored. The overpowered air-conditioning system labored noisily but in vain: *pocketa-pocketa-urp-pocketa-pocketa-urp*. The reporters leered at him, and several of the older and drunker ones were literally smacking their lips in anticipation. The questions came in a great, shrieking wave: "Mr. Secretary, why are you so stupid?" "Mr. Secretary, if this administration can't handle a simple task like ending poverty in one week, why shouldn't the president be impeached?" "Mr. Secretary, you sorry bastard, how can you even stand to look at yourself in the mirror?"

Robert B. Reich waited for the poltroons to pause for breath, and, when they did, he was ready. "You miserable curs," he said. "There isn't one of you fit to lick the boots of this administration. Remember this: you may hate your country, but the rest of us love it. And we'll keep on doing our level best to move it forward, and you may be damned." Robert B. Reich turned to leave, and a snarling, slobbering weasel-faced fellow, a *Times*man by the look of him, leaped up to land a sucker punch from behind. Without even glancing in the coward's direction, Robert B. Reich lashed his powerful right arm backwards, catching his misguided assailant on the point of his chin and sending him in a crumpled heap to the floor. Robert B. Reich walked on.

For the second time that day, as he strode in long, manly strides through the mess of scribblers slinking away, Robert B. Reich allowed a slight smile of satisfaction to play across his craggy face. He had less than a minute to get to the Situation Room. Pyongyang had finally done it. The missiles were already in the air.

MICHAEL KELLY

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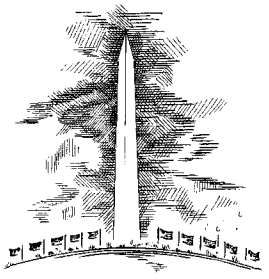
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Beating the wrap

ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING cultural phenomena in Washington, D.C., these days is the success of a shiny new California-based eatery called WrapWorks. More than six months after the restaurant's opening, queues of customers, the faithful and the curious, spill outside its tall glass doors every noonday. The food is fast and neat, and intriguing in its eclecticism: Japanese soba noodles, Kung Pao chicken, blackened catfish mixed with mango salsa, all rolled into technicolor tortillas. The cheerful and many-hued baristas insist that you not call these snacks burritos. "Wraps" is the preferred term, the proper de-ethnicized label for such resolutely multiethnic fare. As patrons order their Thai peanut chicken and Chinese salad wraps, they often marvel at the food. They should. This is more than a triumph of good cheap eats; it's a triumph of the melting pot, an edible shrine to cross-culturalism, the new soul food for a happily polyglot society.

ALL AT ONCE, MULTIRACIALISM HAS become an American fashion, commercially chic. In April, 21-year-old golf superstar Tiger Woods revealed that he does not consider himself black, but rather "Cablinasian," a blending of his Caucasian, black, Indian and Thai blood. "I'm just who I am," he said. Newspapers rattled off demographic figures showing that the number of multiracial children in the U.S. has quadrupled since 1970, that the rate of black-white marriages has risen threefold in the last thirty years, that as many as 100 million Americans can claim mixed lineage. *Newsweek* pointed out that, in addition to Woods, stars like Keanu Reeves, Mariah Carey and Johnny Depp boast "ambiguous or mixed ethnicity." Pundits hailed the dawning of a new age in American race relations, where the old rigid classifications of black and white give way to "many shades of beige." A Nike ad shows a succession of children of various races, each declaring, "I am Tiger Woods." We are all Tiger Woods now.

THE OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND Budget will determine this summer whether to add a new "multiracial" category to the racial classifications listed on U.S. Census forms—currently limited to "white," "black," "American Indian or Alaskan Native" and "Asian or Pacific Islander," plus an option for respondents of Hispanic origin. Supporters of the measure sensibly ask why millions of American children born to parents of different races should be forced to choose between them. But African American and Asian interest groups howl that the multiracial option will lower the numbers of Americans who situate themselves within the time-honored castes, and might encourage mixed-race citizens to flee their "blackness." (And yellowness and redness.) "If you look black," says one University of Virginia professor, "you are black." This reasoning, of course, is precisely what African Americans fought against for most of this century, when many states held onto "one-drop" miscegenation laws that barred anyone with a hint of black blood from intermarrying. But more than consistency is at stake now. Things like federal housing dollars and legislative redistricting rest upon a cold racial calculus. Numbers matter. And multiracialism, paradoxically, is leaving transracial solidarity in tatters.



IF GIVEN THE CHOICE, I WILL CHECK the "multiracial" box on the Census survey three years from now. For years, I've selected the "other" option on official forms; there is nothing demonstrably inaccurate about identifying myself as "Asian or Pacific Islander," but that has never seemed satisfying enough. My skin color is dark brown, but a slight angle at the corner of my eyes, or a touch of lightness in my hue, betrays me. My father is an ethnic Tamil from Sri Lanka; my mother is a Malaysian of Chinese descent. So I am linked genealogically to mainland China as well as to the Indian subcontinent. Which is to say, as an American, not by much.

THE RICHES THAT AN INTERRACIAL background bestows are modest ones, as quiet and simple as an old story retold, or a traditional meal recreated. They are treasures, in short, not so different from those shared by any other family, in any other place. That I come from mixed-race parents means that I sometimes eat with chopsticks, and sometimes with my hands; that I'm given the occasional second glance when I buy groceries with my mother; that I feel little pressure to date within a single race. Beyond that, it means nothing. It does not shape how I perceive the world or, beyond a cursory level, how the world perceives me. It does not influence how I work, or what I write or whom I love. It is not destiny, nor religion, nor identity.

IN RESPONSE TO THE RESISTANCE from traditional minority groups, the champions of multiracialism have stepped up their campaign. There are mixed-race magazines and web sites. Multiracial student associations have sprouted on college campuses like Brown, Wesleyan and Berkeley—Harvard boasts two, one for half-black and one for half-Asian students. They employ the familiar argot of race and identity that has done so much, in recent times, to brighten the color line. "I'm not going to sacrifice my identity for the black community," a biracial Brown sophomore told *The Boston Globe*. Says the president of the Association of Multi-Ethnic Americans: "This same one-drop rule is being used by minorities to keep power and rights at the expense of my community."

BUT WHAT "COMMUnity" is that? The great promise of America's multiracial citizens is that, as their numbers grow, they might render our ossified categories of race meaningless. Yet many multiracialists seem intent on doing just the opposite—inventing some spurious experience, some artificial epistemology, that all multiracial people inherit, as if a child born to one black and one white parent holds some inviolable connection with a child born to yellow and white parents, or, like me, to brown and yellow ones. Rather than exposing the chimera of identity politics, this movement strengthens it, devising another illusory racial home in which the purportedly unprotected can find refuge and be whole.

ALAS, SURVEYS SHOW THAT FEW Americans would choose to identify themselves as multiracial if offered the choice. So the ugly sniping among minority groups will probably subside. Hungry Washingtonians will still flock to WrapWorks. Tiger Woods will go back to just being a superb athlete. I saw him play once: he was a freshman at Stanford, already something of a novelty on campus. He hit his first drive that spring day more than 300 yards, dead center, and then proceeded to play what I'm sure was one of the worst rounds of his life. He bogeyed the first five holes. He cursed and ranted and flung his clubs. He wheezed from the pollen. He seemed very mortal and very young—and, for that, a lot like us. After the tenth hole, his shoulder hurting, Tiger quit. Everyone sighed disappointedly. Then I watched as his black father and Asian mother drew close, putting their arms around their son, shielding him.

ROMESH RATNESAR

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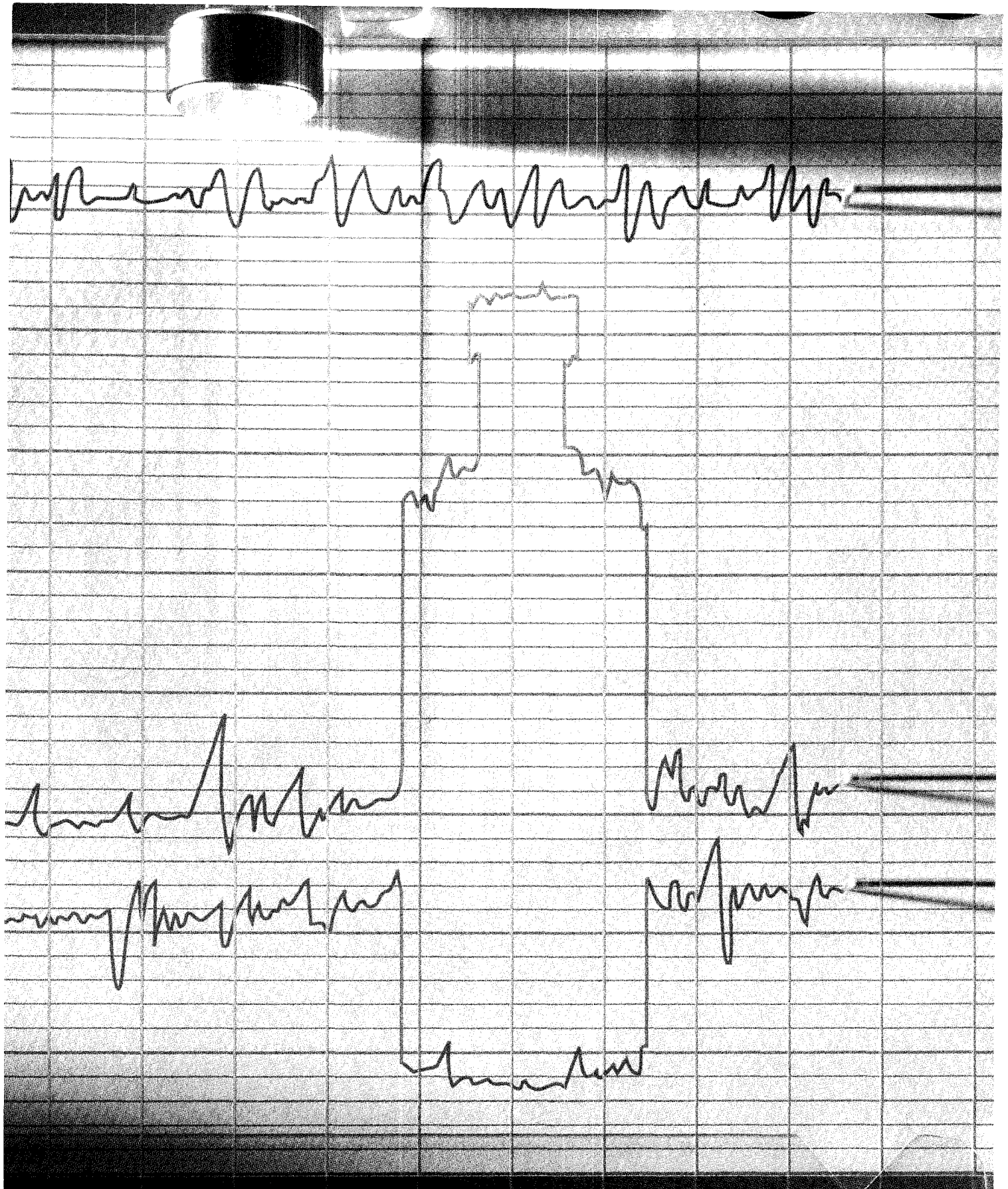

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